

“No man is poor who has had a godly mother.” – Abraham Lincoln

I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:3-7)

Esther 2:1-18

The King's Regret

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. ²Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. ³And 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 capital, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. ⁴And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

- The King regrets his hasty decision
 - What does he miss about Vashti?
- God's providential work in choosing a new queen
 - This is a very strange way to choose a new queen

Introductions:

⁵Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, 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. ⁷He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman 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.

Mordecai

- Jewish man
- Probably is a Persian official
- Had adopted his cousin after her parents died

Esther

- Called by two names
 - Jewish Name: Hadassah (Myrtle)
 - Persian Name: Esther (Star)
- What do we learn about Esther?
 - She is Jewish
 - She is part of an endangered minority
 - She no doubt follows different customs than most of Persian
 - She worships a different God
 - Beautiful
 - The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at
 - Young
 - Less than 20 years old
 - Orphan
 - Obscurity and Unimportance

Preparation:

⁸So 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. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰ Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. ¹¹And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

- The Contestants
 - According to Josephus there were 400 women in this contest.
- "Esther also was taken into the king's palace"
 - Taken
- What kind of environment is Esther going into?
 - I think it is safe to say this is not a place where cultivating good character is a priority.
 - Seduction
 - Pursuit of beauty
 - Selfishness
 - Competition
 - Rivalry
- Esther *won favor*
 - Cosmetics
 - Food
 - Servants
 - Best Place in the harem
- Mordecai
 - See his care and concern for Esther

The "Contest":

¹²Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women— ¹³when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

- A time of preparation
 - 12 Months
- Given anything desired
 - Jewels
 - Ornaments
 - Cosmetics
 - Apparel
 - Given anything desired

Esther and the King:

¹⁵When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, 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. ¹⁶And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, ¹⁷the 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. ¹⁸Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

What Can We Learn From Esther?

Esther possessed inner beauty

- What makes Esther stand out?
 - She is beautiful, but so is everyone else
 - It is her character that separates her from the others in the king's harem

And the young woman pleased him and won his favor (2:9)

Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. (2:15)

The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins (2:17)

- Often we focus so much on making the outside beautiful
 - Which is something we have limited control over
- We often neglect the inner workings of our person
 - Which is something that we can work on
- What makes Esther stand out is her inner beauty

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:6-7)

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1 Peter 3:3-4)

Esther possessed restraint

Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. (2:10)

She asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. (2:15)

Esther was humble

- Esther went from a very lowly position to a position of great prestige and power.

Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. (2:10)

She asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. (2:15)

Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. (2:20)

Esther was authentic (she did not compromise who she was)

- Esther is in a contest
 - The purpose of being in a contest is to win
 - How do you win this contest?
 - By being exactly what the king wants
 - From this passage it seems Esther went to the king without pretense, simply as herself

And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, ¹⁷the 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. (2:16-17)

Esther's Three Choices

1. Conformity

- Esther could have conformed to the culture of the harem
 - Seduction
 - Greed
 - Selfishness
 - Hunger for power
- We often use a bad situation as an excuse for bad behavior
 - "Everybody else is doing it"
 - "They deserved it"
 - "It's not my fault..."

2. Bitterness

- Esther has a lot to complain about
 - Taken from her home
 - She is in a much different culture with different customs where a different god is worshipped.
 - Why has this happened to me?
- We often become angry at what we consider unfair
 - "Why is this happening to me?"
 - "I don't deserve this!"
 - "See how much better I am than everyone else"

3. Character

- Esther doesn't conform to the culture of the harem
- Esther doesn't become bitter over her situation
- Esther demonstrates grace and beauty in the face of a difficult situation

What will you choose?