

2. The Bachelor – Persian style

April 24, 2008

I've read the Book of Esther many times for our studies. The more I read it, the more I think about a TV reality show called "The Bachelor". I have not watched it, because it is a completely ignorant and repulsive show from what I saw in its preview.

One man gets to choose a woman out of many female contestants who would do anything including having sex with this man whom they barely know for 15 minutes of fame and money. They don't have shame or dignity.

In my opinion, the contestants of these kinds of reality shows are making themselves fools in front of millions of viewers to fulfill their carnal desires. It is another great example of human depravity.

But as we will find out, Esther, a Jewish virgin who used to be tucked away in a Persian village with her cousin Mordecai's family, was looking forward to be an ordinary Jewish wife and mom, was thrown into "The Bachelor – Persian Style" reality show without a choice.

However, it was a part of God's incredible providential will that was orchestrated magnificently to show His glory and majesty.

In this study, I am going to emphasize two points:

- 1) **The characters of Esther that all of us should learn**
- 2) **God's unseen control that weaved through the fabric of this saga**

A. LET THE GAME BEGIN

Esther 2:1-4 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. 2 Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. 4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

Nearly four years have passed since Queen Vashti was deposed. During that time, Ahasuerus led his ill-fated war against Greece and came home in humiliation of defeat instead of honor.

Though he had a harem full of concubines, he missed his deposed queen. There is a difference between love and sex. The passing excitement of the moment is not the same as the lasting enrichment of a lifetime relationship with your spouse.

The king's advisers were concerned that Vashti not be restored to be queen. Because if she regained her throne, their heads would be off from their shoulders. After all, it was they who had told the king to remove her.

It sounds like a fairy tale for a farm girl becoming the queen of the kingdom, but I wonder how many beautiful girls in Persia hid when the king's officers showed up to abduct them? Heartbroken mothers and fathers no doubt lied to the officers and

denied that they had any virgin daughters. Perhaps some of the girls married any available man rather than spend a hopeless life shut up in the king's harem. Once they had been with the king, they belonged to him and could not marry. If the king ignored them, they were destined for a life of loneliness, shut up in a royal harem. Honor? Maybe. Happiness? No!

B. ESTHER'S FAMILY

Esther 2:5-7 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. 6 Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7 And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Mordecai's ancestor, Kish, was among the Jews taken to Babylon from Jerusalem in the second deportation in 597 B.C. Cyrus, King of Persia, entered Babylon in 539 and the next year gave the Jews permission to return to their land. About 50,000 responded. In later years, other Jews returned to Israel. But Mordecai chose to remain in Persia. While the Babylonians made life difficult for the Jews, the Persians were more lenient to aliens and many Jews prospered in the land of their captors.

C. ESTHER'S SIX GODLY CHARACTERS

Esther 2:8-20 So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 (1) Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women. 10 (2) Esther had not revealed her people or family, (3) for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. 12 (4) Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. 13 Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name. 15 Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. 16 (5) So 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. 17 The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen

instead of Vashti. 18 (6) Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king. 19 When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says the Ahasuerus had a total of 400 women selected.

When you imagine how competitive the contestants must have been at the prospect of being chosen queen, Esther's reluctance must have come across as wonderfully unique. Undoubtedly, Esther's inner beauty eclipsed the jealous, greedy and self-absorbed women of the harem, and that's what caught Hegai's eye.

God is so great that He can work even in the heart and mind of the keeper of a harem. Hegai was a Gentile. Even today, God is working in places where you and I might think He is absent like the Democrat Party, ACLU, Planned Parenthood, Abortion Clinics and Arizona Governor's office.

In the passages that follow, at least six of her attractive qualities stand out:

1) Esther had a grace-filled charm and elegance – v9

Her manner was filled with a pleasantness in the presence of others. It is no wonder why Hegai chose to treat Esther preferentially over other women.

Do we treat others with grace, pleasantness and kindness when we are treated rudely? Can that rude person see Jesus in us without telling them we are Christians?

2) Esther had an unusual restraint and control – v10a

Esther knew the value of verbal restraint while every young woman tried to make others know why she should be queen. Even when she became queen, she kept the secret Mordecai had told her to keep. That must have created an air of mystery and charm about her.

Do we control our mouths in front of others? Saying what is necessary is important. Not saying what is NOT necessary is equally important.

3) Esther had a continually teachable spirit – v10b

Isn't it lovely to come across a woman of such stunning beauty who also had such a teachable spirit, such a willingness to listen and learn? Sometimes the more gifted we are – or the more physically endowed, the more popular, the more prominent in position – the less teachable we become. Which is unfortunate, because none of those gifts gives us a corner on wisdom.

I am sure that all of you can name a few you know who think they know it all and parade like a peacock. They forget that a peacock still has a bird brain.

Before we go anywhere, we need to look at one thing here. Mordecai told his cousin not to reveal her nationality, being a Jew. If we apply that into our situation, it is like not telling others that we are Christians.

There are far too many Christians who act as if they are "secret agents" – and they always conceal who they are in the Lord as if it is a shame. We must take the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 10:32-33 seriously.

Matthew 10:32-33 "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Does this mean Mordecai and Esther did wrong? I believe Mordecai was lead by the Spirit of God to keep his and her identity quiet until the right moment. When Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons approach me to talk about their religions, I don't tell them that I am a pastor right away. I listen and ask questions that they cannot answer. When they ask me what I do for living, then I tell them.

I remember what Augustine said: "Preach the Gospel. If you have to, use words." I believe our actions and the way we carry ourselves should speak who we are in Christ more than what we claim with our mouths.

4) Esther had an unselfish modesty and authenticity – v12-15

Can you imagine giving all the women with unlimited credit cards and drop them off at the Scottsdale Mall where they have Christian Dior, Armani, Gucci, Estee Lauder, Harry Winston and of course, Coach Purse store, anything they want all at no cost. No doubt, most of the women went crazy on their shopping spree, except for Esther. She restrained herself and took only what she was recommended. I am sure that it was rather refreshing for those who were around these ladies.

When an opportunity comes for us to do whatever our hearts desire, do we consult with the Lord for His guidance or do we do whatever our carnal nature want to do?

5) Esther had a winsomeness, regardless of her surroundings – v16-17

Compared to the other women in the harem, her winsomeness and charm stood out in Ahasuerus' eyes like a beautiful swan in an ugly duck pond.

It is a common acknowledgement that physically good looking people can gain favor with others. For Esther, she won the hearts of people including the king's with her winsomeness, not with her beauty only.

6) Esther had a humble respect for authority – v18-20

Now Esther's golden opportunity came with her newly acquired position as queen to throw off the shackles of accountability to her cousin. But she resisted the temptation. She still submitted to Mordecai's counsel – a course of action that would later bring her up to the heights of heroism.

When the Lord put you in a place where you can command others, I hope and pray that you would do the same thing that Esther did. Keeping humility is a lesson we need to learn from our Savior Jesus. In this 'SELF' world, a person with true humility is such a breath of fresh air.

This remarkable course of events wasn't an accident. It wasn't just because of luck or fortune or Esther's good looks or sparkling personality. God had a plan, and Esther is part of it.

Psalm 75:6-7 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. 7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

D. THE PROMOTION THAT LED TO NEXT PROMOTION

Esther 2:21-23 In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and

sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

We now see Mordecai in a position of honor and authority, sitting at the king's gate where he gets to hear an assassination attempt to the king which is going to be used by God to bring the next move.

Mordecai received neither recognition nor reward for saving the king's life. No matter. God saw to it that the facts were permanently recorded in the Persian Chronicles, and He would make good use of them at the right time. Our good works are like seeds that are planted by faith, and their fruits don't always appear immediately.

Proverbs 13:21 Evil pursues sinners, But to the righteous, good shall be repaid.

God's timing is always perfect, and He sees to it that no good deed is ever wasted.

Esther was divinely prepared for her role as the new queen. God is never surprised by circumstances or at a loss for prepared servants. He had Joseph ready in Egypt, Ezekiel and Daniel in Babylon, and Nehemiah in Susa. And He had Esther ready for her ministry to the Jews in the Persian Empire.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Ask God to cultivate within you a discontent with the superficial and a desire for the spiritual.

2 Corinthians 3:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2) Sometimes God allows wicked actions of men to fulfill a purpose in His greater plan.

We find assurance in the truth that no other person, no matter how evil they are, can defeat God's plan for our life, no matter what they have done to you or will do to you.