

"All Eyes on Esther" Esther 2:10-18
Wednesday 9/12/18 – Jeff Lyle

I. An Atmosphere of Watchful Secrecy (10-11)

A. Mordecai employed faith on Esther's behalf (10) - "Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known."

As Mordecai recognized that the young woman he was raising was now taken to become part of King Xerxes harem, he discerned that the best thing for Esther's well-being would be to preserve her religious heritage and racial distinction as a Jewess. Esther is seen to be very confident in Mordecai's leadership of her life. More than once, her story reveals that she looked to him for guidance and counsel. Mordecai stands in stark contrast to all the other men in the Book of Esther. He used his strength and position to better a woman while all the other men in this story seem to use their abilities to use women for their own purposes. Mordecai must have considered it a matter of prudence for Esther to remain secretive about her faith and race. The time would come later when Mordecai would counsel Esther to boldly proclaim her full identity as a Jewess. For now, he counseled her secrecy.

B. Mordecai tracked the facts on Esther's behalf (11) - "And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her."

The paternal instincts of Mordecai reveal a noble man with a concerned heart for his helpless cousin. He intentionally learned the best place where he could keep an eye on Esther and stay updated on what was happening with her. It may be that he even had personal access with her to speak with Esther directly. The Scripture is clear that he made a daily trip to check on her welfare. Given that the process lasted a year, this is an indicator of the remarkable instinct to protect Esther. While it is no longer popular to communicate that the role of a man is to use his strength to provide for and protect a woman, it is clear that this aspect of being male is evidenced in countless examples in Scripture. The ultimate picture of this is Jesus Christ laying down His own life in order to protect His bride from the death which Satan seeks to inflict upon her. How different King Xerxes appears before us as he uses his power and position to please himself at the women's expense. Mordecai is sacrificial, protective and concerned. Esther is blessed to be under his covering.

II. A System of Sexualized Power (12-15a)

A. The women were groomed to please the king (12-13) - “Now 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 - 13 when 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.”

The Miss Persia pageant, as I like to call it, was well underway. A large number of young, beautiful women had been relocated to the capital. They were lavished with the highest quality cosmetics, perfumes and oils to prepare their bodies for the king's indulgence. Whether the young women desired to be engaged in this process is not mentioned. Ultimately, it is irrelevant because they would have had no choice in the matter either way. They spent a year in what was basically a high-end Persian spa treatment. Before the modern reader thinks on how wonderful this might be, we should remember that the end of the process was to be deposited in the bedchamber of a middle-aged man whom the woman had never meant. She would be expected to comply with his every sexual demand and then she would be dismissed to learn whether she was accepted or rejected by him. This is nothing but the absolute sexual objectification of women. Esther, at this point, was just a sexual object with a number on her head.

B. The king was sexually serviced by the women (14) - “In 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.”
One young woman would become the queen, the rest would be unmarried concubines for life

How fortunate we are to be spared the details of what went on in the king's bedroom with each of the women. We know that the meeting was centered in sexual activity as the king “tried out” each woman to determine where she ranked. When the Scripture states that the women would never see the man who took their virginity again unless he “delighted in her and summoned her by name”, we recognize the utter humiliation that would ultimately rest on all the

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women but the singular one who would become queen. Esther could do nothing but comply with the degrading process and trust God for His protection and promotion in the distasteful process.

C. Esther had her purity taken (15a) - "When 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..."

This is the moment of truth for Esther. After being forced into the Miss Persia contest, her night with the king now arrived on the calendar. It is noteworthy that the name of her biological father is mentioned here as Esther is given in to the hands of a man who, at this point, cared nothing for her beyond her body. God's plan for women is for them to be born into the protective, loving care of a father and then to be released into the protective, loving care of a husband. Esther had lost her father and was now being given into the arms of man whom she had never met. We can only imagine the anxiety in her heart. The fact that this verse mentions that she took nothing with her serves as a picture of complete surrender to the will of God. She had been prepared for the king, but she leaned upon the Lord in the moment of destiny. That night, a pagan king would take the virginity of a young woman. Her only hope was that this man would make Esther his wife and queen. Otherwise, she would be dismissed and discarded with all the other women who did not make the cut.

III. Esther Was Protected & Promoted by God (15b-18)

A. An unseen hand was holding Esther (15b) - "Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her."

This is a simple footnote, but it aptly describes the reality of believers who are living in circumstances beyond their full understand and out of their control. In the midst of earthly trouble, we can experience heavenly favor. It is not likely that Esther understood that the activity of her God was superintending this whole troubling process. She would simply note that things were turning in her favor while she lived out the difficulty of being a woman prepared to give her entire self to a pagan king. She was walking through a difficult valley, but God was holding her hand.

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B. A sovereign hand turned the heart of the king (16) - 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, 17a the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins..."

Now this is a glorious breakthrough in what has been a very ominous story. As the king spent a night with Esther, he found himself more pleased with her than any of the other women in the contest. Xerxes would have been completely unaware that there was One infinitely more powerful than he who was in control. Proverbs 21:1 teaches that God sovereignly rules over the hearts of kings, turning their desires to accomplish His own plans. The big-picture reality is that God was never in doubt that Esther would be the one whom Xerxes chose. He allowed the process to play out, giving favor to Esther all along the way. When the time came, Xerxes had no doubts - the young woman named Esther would become his new queen. What an awesome example for all of us to trust God when circumstances are beyond our abilities and people are making decisions which affect our lives. Ultimately, when we come to confidence that God is for us and that He is in control, we learn to wait upon Him to work out His own plans on our behalf.

C. A gracious hand promoted Esther (17b-18) - "...so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then 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."

Once the decision was formalized, Esther was publicly presented as the new queen in the Persian empire. A young, exiled Jewess who had been orphaned and had no human hopes to ever be ushered into royalty was now wearing the royal crown atop her head. A feast was thrown in her honor which was accompanied with a tax break for the citizens of the empire. Do you see what God has done? He has elevated a woman from obscurity to the highest honor of any woman in the land. For a season Esther had lived in a world defined by loss and many unknowns. Her unforeseen breakthrough had arrived, and God orchestrated a reversal of destiny for her. But her story was not yet completed. Her destiny was just beginning. Soon, there would be a people to rescue through a single act of risk and faith that would cause Esther to lay everything down before the Lord once again.