

Esther 1-5 - The Rise of a Queen

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Open your Bibles to the Book of Esther. We're going to begin Esther tonight. This will be part one. Next Wednesday is going to be part 2 and the conclusion.

We're going to cover... The Book of Esther covers 10 chapters. We're going to cover 5 chapters a night. You don't believe it, do you? We're going to. We really are. And this is just a great book, a great study, so since we're going to cover so much, we better pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word tonight. Let your Word just really shine in our hearts. Let it fill us, Lord, with insight and understanding.

Let us, Lord God, really grow from the study of Your Word, particularly tonight from the study of the Book of Esther. We ask You to teach us. We ask You to fill us. We ask You to guide us tonight. In Jesus name, amen. Amen.

The Book of Esther, I'm going to give a very brief introduction here since we've got so much to cover. But the Book of Esther is a very interesting one on several fronts.

It is, first of all, the last of the historical books in the Old Testament. It takes place after the Babylonian exile. In other words, after the 70 years. But some, but it happens in the Persian kingdom where many of the Jews still reside.

You'll remember that the Jews were given freedom to go back to their homeland after 70 years to begin to rebuild the temple and then later on rebuild the wall. We covered those events in Ezra and Nehemiah. But, it's now many, many years after the Babylonian exile, but as I said, many of the Jews still live in the Persian Empire.

And the main character of this book is a woman, a Jewish woman, named Hadassah, but you know her as Esther. Hadassah is her Hebrew name. Esther is her Persian name. It means star, by the way. And Esther, as a book, was written primarily to explain the background of the Feast of Purim, which we will talk about and we will get into. And it was given as an explanation for the Jews so that they would continue to observe the Feast of Purim and observe it properly.

And the origin of that feast the celebration of Purim, centers around what happens in this book, which is an attempt to wipe out the Nation of Israel as a people. And it is a story of God's intervention on behalf of His people through the instrumental work of a woman named Esther who was courageously used of the Lord in saving her people.

Another very interesting thing about the Book of Esther, before we get into it, is that there is no mention of God. There is no mention outright of God by name. He is not mentioned specifically in the Book of Esther. And you might be thinking, what in the world is a book of the Bible doing in the Bible if it doesn't mention God? Isn't it just then an historical book that has some, was somehow archived and found its way into the Biblical canon that really, perhaps, might even not belong there?

Well, the fact of the matter is the Book of Esther does belong in the Biblical canon. And one of the reasons I believe it belongs in the Biblical canon is that I don't believe things happen by chance. I don't believe things just happen. I believe God is behind and God is working through people and challenging our lives to be used by Him in significant ways. And we're going to see how events take place. And it's probably going to look and even sound rather circumstantial to you as we read through and finish this book.

But, I want to challenge you to see God behind the circumstances. See, that's something that is uniquely a perspective of born again Christians who have begun to acknowledge the Lord in all of their ways. What does that mean to acknowledge the Lord in all of your ways? It means to see God in the circumstances that people would otherwise miss. Right? Acknowledge the Lord in all of your ways. That means acknowledge God. See God in life. See God in what would otherwise be secular circumstances.

I've been challenged by unbelievers. Whenever I try to give glory to the Lord for something or say, God did this or God did that, people go, oh, Paul, stop saying that. God didn't do any such thing. That's just the way things worked out. And that is what secularism, of course, wants to do. It wants to see just a natural progression of events that really don't involve God in any way. Right? It just happened that way.

And we as Christians, we even get sucked into that sometimes to the point where we leave God out of circumstances. We talk about what... And sometimes we're afraid to bring Him in because we're afraid that if we do, we're going to have to charge Him with wrongdoing. I see something what I consider to be very tragic take place, and I don't want to bring God's name into the

equation because otherwise people might think, and I might even begin to believe somehow God had a hand in this tragedy.

We forget that God works all things together for the good of those that love Him and are the called according to His purpose. We forget that sometimes, God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. That's a reminder to you and I to see God.

What we do sometimes though, is we judge a situation or a circumstance as being either, it's either missing God or God missed it or us. Because we judge it based on, well, I don't see anything good coming out of this thing.

Have you ever, have you ever... Have you learned, I guess I should ask, in your life, that it takes great patience many times to see the hand of God through the set of circumstances that may unfold before you. You and I see situations happen and we look at them and we judge them. And many times we even judge God related to those things. But we don't often wait to see how the hand of the Lord moves through those circumstances to bring about the purpose of His will.

This is a secular king. Well, secular from the standpoint of, I guess, true godliness. He's not secular in the sense that he has no religion doesn't believe in any gods. Let's put it this way, he's a pagan king but God can use a pagan king. God can use anyone He wants to accomplish His purpose and His will.

Just because something happens in the secular arena doesn't mean God's not involved. When God... Let me back up that statement. When you watch something like the election of a President of the United States and the person who you didn't want to be elected president is elected. Which has happened a few times in my lifetime. What is your natural response? Well, our prayers didn't get answered. And we tend, we... The last thing we want to say is God put that man in office. Right? We don't want to say... I don't want to charge God with that. Good grief. Somebody might start to think He's like either a Democrat or a Republican or something. We don't want to say something...God...

But doesn't the book of Romans actually say that, there is no authority that has not been established by God. Doesn't it actually say that in Romans chapter 13? (Romans 13:1) It does. It does. And we look at that and we go, you're trying to tell me God would put that man in the office of President? Yeah, that's exactly what I'm saying. Because God's purpose goes beyond the wishes sometimes, even of His people. God's purpose prevails.

Listen, the Bible doesn't say that when we pray we always get our way. It says when we pray according to His will, He hears us. But we know that God has a purpose. God has a plan and God is bringing that plan to fruition. Right?

And He's going to continue to do that even when it seems to run contrary to what we think. I like that about God. It vexes me on the one hand, it delights me on the other. We better get into this.

Esther chapter 1.

"¹ Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel," (ESV)

By the way, your Bible, instead of Susa, may say Shushan. If you have a Bible that actually has a different name. And the reason for that is that the Hebrew name for that city is Shushan. The Persian name was Susa.

And it tells us here that "² *in those days King Ahasuerus...*" also known as Xerxes, the son of Darius the Great, was ruling over an enormous kingdom. We're told here in verse one involved 127 provinces of which Israel is part, is a province. And it stretched from India to Africa. Now that is an enormous kingdom for one man to rule. And this is a man who's early in his reign and he rules over this enormous kingdom.

We're told in verse 3, "*in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴ while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.*"

Two quick things. First of all Ahasuerus or Xerxes is a Medo-Persian king. The Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonian Empire. Do you guys remember back in Daniel there was a vision given Nebuchadnezzar about a statue? And the head was gold and the arms and the chest were silver. And then it progressively deteriorated on down through the statue. You have bronze and then the feet and so forth. They were told in Daniel that those different elements represented different kingdoms that were to be world rulers.

And you'll remember Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon, was the head of gold. And Daniel said, O king, you are the head of gold and you have a glorious kingdom. But after you will rise another kingdom, less glorious, but no less powerful,

necessarily. And it will be the silver, represented by the silver chest and arms of the statue that you saw in your vision. And that was the Medo-Persian Empire. So, we've already seen part of the fulfillment of what was given in Daniel about this, I believe it's Daniel chapter 3, about this kingdom that took over from the Babylonian Empire. Alright.

Now the Medes and the Persians are in control. And it says that king Ahasuerus took 180 days to show all of the splendor and greatness of his kingdom. That's 6 months, you guys. And so, apparently he's got on display the glory of his kingdom. And he's ushering in people from all of the provinces that he rules over a period of 6 months so that they can come and witness the glory of his kingdom.

This is an amazing kingdom; incredible stuff. 6 months to show everybody all the greatness of the kingdom.

"And when these days were completed, (verse 5,) the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. (And) ⁶ There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones."

I don't know how good your imagination is, but just let it go to the ends. This is opulence on steroids. It is beautiful. It is incredible. Gold and silver and beautiful violet and, hanging curtains and it's just absolutely gorgeous.

And it says, "⁷ Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, (meaning that there were no two alike) and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king." Notice that he was so lavish that he wanted there to be not two goblets that were similar. They were all unique and beautiful. That's amazing, isn't it?

In our house it's pretty often that there's no two cups the same too. But for very different reasons. Because we keep breaking them. Right? And you just, you open your cupboard and everything's different. But for Ahasuerus, that was a sign of his opulence and bounty.

And it says in verse 8, "*And drinking was according to this edict: "There was no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.*" And you think, well, what is that all about?

See, back in those days, the king was so important to the feast, whenever he took a drink everybody had to take a drink. Whenever he made a toast, everybody had to drink with that toast. You were compelled to drink whenever the king drank, so if the king was a drinker, then that's just what you would have to do. But he's being very benevolent about this and very kind, and he says, listen, there's no compulsion here to drinking.

It says in verse 9 that, "*Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.*" Stop there for a moment. This tells us a very important part note. It tells us that where King Ahasuerus was, it was just men. It tells us where Queen Vashti was, it was just women, so what do you have here? You have all of the men who are getting together for a period of 7 days (gesturing to the left.) And you have women who are getting together over here (gesturing to the right) for that same period of time, feasting, and drinking, and that sort of thing.

Now, that's an important thing to remember. Because you probably know what happens when men get together for an extended period of time and drink. They begin over time to act stupid. That's exactly right. They lose their minds. They lose their sense of propriety. And they start doing very dumb things.

Check this out. Verse 10, "*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, (it's a very nice way of saying he was blasted) he commanded Mehumen, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas. the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.*"

Now, we don't, we don't know exactly what is going on here. But according to Jewish tradition, which tried to explain some of these unknown things, this request came from an argument among the men of the feast as to which country had the most beautiful women. And Ahasuerus decided to settle the issue by putting his wife on public display. And that could be the explanation for it.

But here's one thing we do know. We know that even in those days, Persian women did not go into public, in other words, with other men, with their face unveiled. A woman always had her face veiled so if the king is asking for Vashti to come and to display her beauty, he is asking her to be unveiled in public, which of course, wasn't culturally acceptable for the women.

I mean, to have her veiled there wouldn't show her beauty at all. Right? So she would have to remove the veil. And she was a very beautiful woman but he's asking her to do something that was culturally unacceptable.

It says in verse 12, *"But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him."*

And probably not unlikely that the alcohol had something to do with his anger. You know how alcohol can do that to someone. And again we're not told specifically why Vashti refused. But in the end it really didn't matter because she essentially committed three very serious no's in that culture.

First of all, she publicly challenged the authority of a man. Women just couldn't do that; even the queen. Secondly, she publicly challenged the authority of her husband, for which the men of the kingdom will rise up and speak in a very short moment. And thirdly, she defied the command of the king, which of course, was enough to even bring death to anyone.

Vashti has really, really offended the king. His honor has been offended. His pride has been wounded, and he is going to be forced to do something about it to save face in the kingdom.

It says in verse 13, *"Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, 14 the men next to him being... (and then it names them there once again,) ...the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom):*

15 "According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?" Then Memucan said the in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus."

Not to put too fine a point on it here. But he's basically saying, she has not just offended you, O king, she's offended every man and every woman. Every man has been offended because he needs to maintain order in his home. And every woman has ultimately been offended because she is expressing an example that is very contrary to the way women should act.

And he says in verse 17 *"For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, "King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come. 18 This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.*

19 If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. (So this man is suggesting that Queen Vashti be deposed.)

20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." (What do you suppose that's going to sound like spoken to another man? It says,) "21 This advice pleased the king (no doubt) and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. (And) 22 He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people."

What do you think? Does that sound cool to you? I mean, that just sounds a little strange. Can you imagine this word like getting to the Jews as an example? They're one of the provinces, so they would have gotten a little written thing. Somebody showed up somewhere. I don't know if they nailed it onto the door of some important building or they read it in the city square. I don't know how they got this across, necessarily. It was given to all of the governors to just disseminate among the people.

But can you imagine this kind of thing coming from the, from king Ahasuerus to all these people in these outlying areas? And they stop what they're doing long enough to hear what the king has to say. What is the message of the king? Let's hear it. Here it is, every man should be master of his own house. Okay. All right. Let's get back to work" It's like, fine, it's not that big of a deal, sort of a thing. But what is a big deal is that Vashti is removed from the throne for what she did. And she is no longer to even come before the king.

Chapter 2, *"1 After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done (what he had, or excuse me,) what had been decreed against her. (And) 2 Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 3 And*

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 citadel, 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 (women, or) woman (rather) who pleases the king, be queen instead of Vashti." (And lo and behold, I know this is going to be a shocker, but it says,) This pleased the king, and he did so."

Let me just tell you what's going on here. What they're suggesting is that the king establish a harem. And probably a new one for the king, that would be filled with women from his kingdom that were exceptionally beautiful, and had never been with a man before.

Now, understand this. All of these women will become his concubines. All of them. They will literally become his wives in the sense of a concubine. Right? Which is not a full-fledged legal wife in the true sense. And of course it's contrary to God's Word most certainly. But all of these women will become his concubines. And they one by one will sleep with him. And based on that one night that the king spends with these women, he is told and encouraged to choose one of them to take the place of Queen Vashti to make that young woman queen in her place. And that is what's going on here.

Verse 4. *"Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite, ⁶ 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. (Now this has been several generations ago.)*

⁷ He 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 mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. ⁸ So when the king's order and his edict (was) 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.

⁹ And 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, (meaning that she was a Jew) for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. 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.

12 Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to (the King to) King Ahauserus, 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 (women) 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. (Meaning, I assume, whatever jewelry, whatever clothing, or something that was the best in the harem. She could take whatever she wanted.)

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. (So, she would go from this harem of the virgins to the harem of the concubines now, since she has basically slept with the king, has now become officially his concubine.) She would not go into the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name."

And many of the women never ever saw the king again after that fateful night. They lived, however, the rest of their days as a concubine in the king's palace, and they were taken care of.

Verse 15.

"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. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. 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, 17 the 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."

Now stop there for just a moment. Because verse 16 is very interesting in that it places these events here in a historical context. Did you notice the author dated the time in verse 16? He says, it was the 10th month of Tebeth, in the 7th year of his reign. That would mean that Esther's entry into the king's favor took place sometime between December of 479 BC or January 478 BC. And this means about four years had passed, actually, since Vashti was dethroned.

And we also know that during this time, king Xerxes spent these four years in war with Greece. His father also, Darius the Great, had been at war with Greece. And Darius had not been all that successful against Greece. Xerxes will not be

all that successful against Greece. And Greece will take over as the next world leader after the Medo-Persian Empire, which is represented by that bronze thigh of the statue of, in Daniel. Eventually the Grecians would defeat and overthrow the Medo-Persian Empire. So, we're told here that Esther became queen.

Verse 18, *"Then the king gave (her, or excuse me, 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."* That's probably going to endear the hearts of the people. Don't have to pay taxes because this girl became queen.

"¹⁹ Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰ Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. ²¹ In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. (Which of course, means they planned to assassinate him.)

²² And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. ²² (And) When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence the king.

¹ And after these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him."

Now we're not told why this man, Haman, was promoted, but we're told he was an Agagite. You might look at that and go, I didn't know there was any people called the Agags. Well there, there isn't. There aren't any people called the Agags, even though he was an Agagite. What this means is, Agag was a title. It was a title for a people called the Amalekites. It was what they called their king, so if you were an Agagite, you were in the royal family of the Amalekites.

Now you might remember the Amalekites. God told the first king of Israel, king Saul, to eliminate the Amalekites. And you'll remember, Saul was disobedient to that command. He did not destroy the Amalekites. Had he been obedient, this whole story might not have even happened. But the Amalekites survived, went into the exile with all the other nations. Were conquered by the Babylonian Empire. And here we have an Amalekite of royal blood, who is serving under King Xerxes in the Persian kingdom.

Verse 2, *"And... the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. (probably because he knew that Haman was an Amalekite,) (And) ³ Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"*

⁴ And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they (finally) told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. (He probably said, I'm a Jew and he's an Amalekite, and I'm never going to bow down to him. Could be.)

⁵ And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. ⁶ But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. (In other words, he didn't want to just take care of Mordecai.) So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, (in other words, they told Haman that Mordecai was a Jew,) Haman (then) sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

⁷ In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar."

Now, this verse assumes that you have a little background on the casting of lots, or the casting of the Pur. This took place, this casting of lots, during the Persian New Year. It was a ritual that was practiced by the astrologers of the kingdom and it was meant to determine the future. And they would cast these lots to speak of, okay, here's what's going to happen in the future.

Now, you'll notice they're casting them in front of Haman, which suggests to us that the purpose of casting some of the lots was to select a day and a month for Haman to carry out his plan which was to commit genocide against the Jews; to destroy all of the Jews.

And that meant, because, by the way, it, you'll notice that the month of Adar came up. And that meant that Naaman, that Haman had one year to carry out his plan. There's only one thing he has to do. And that is he has to sell the king on his plan.

Verse 8, *"Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do*

not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. (Notice he's referred there, to the enemy, as the enemy of the Jews.) 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

Are you getting a good idea of Ahasuerus and the kind of man he is? And how easy he, it is to sway him. He is swayed by alcohol. He is swayed by suggestion. He's swayed by women. He's a man who is in control of a vast kingdom, but he is not in control of himself, his own appetites.

"(And) Then the king's (verse 12) scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors (all over) the provinces and to the officials and of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is in the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. 15 (And) The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. 2 He went up to the entrance to the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. (In fact, you couldn't even come before the king with any sign of mourning on you. You couldn't even go into the gate.)

3 And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. (She doesn't know what's going on yet. She just knows the Jews are in mourning.) She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. (And) 5 Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was.

6 Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, 7 and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. 8 Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people.

9 And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. (And) 10 Then Esther (told) spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law- to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

12 And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. (And) 13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, (That's faith, by the way.) but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (And) 15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,

16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will all so fast as you do. (And) Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. 17 Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

1 (And) On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won

favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter."

You can imagine her heart is probably beating pretty fast up to that point. Because she could be killed, even as queen for going into the presence of the king without permission, without being summoned, she could die just like that. All he has to do is be in a bad mood and just say, I don't recognize that person standing there. They cart them off and that's it, you're done, so she is taking her life in her hands at this point.

"³ And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." (And by the way, that's a phrase that was used not meant to be taken literally. He wasn't offering her half the kingdom. He was simply... That's a statement of grace and acceptance and favor. As if to say to her in essence, you've found favor in my eyes. What is it you want. And I'll, yeah, you've received my favor.

⁴ And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." (And) ⁵ Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. ⁶ And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

⁷ Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: ⁸ If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

⁹ And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and he went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹ And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king.

(And) ¹² Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. ¹³ Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." (And) ¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his

friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. (And) Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." (And) This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made."

Oh dear, what a story. The plot thickens. We find some interesting characters, do we not here, in this story? We're going to have to deal with the conclusion of it next time. But there are some obvious references here that I think that you and I can see the Lord working in-in the hearts of the people. And we're going to see how the Lord works those things out.

And one other thing, this business of the king having to receive you when you go into his throne room by extending his scepter. And if he doesn't, it's, you're dead. Aren't you glad that's not the way your God treats you? Aren't you glad that you don't have to worry and get all upset and frustrated and frightened about approaching God?

The Bible says that we can now come before His presence with confidence. With confidence. What is that confidence in? Well, our confidence is in the fact that we know He's going to receive us. But why is He going to receive us?

On what basis is God going to receive you and I when we come into His presence? Well, it's on the basis of His Son, Jesus Christ, and the blood that has been shed for us on the cross. You never have to worry about approaching God.

I'll be honest with you, it breaks my heart when I talk to Christians who are scared of God. Now, listen, there's a difference between fearing God and being scared of God. We are told to fear God, but that is a holy reverence that understands that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But under the blood of the Lamb and through the blessing of grace and mercy that is extended to us through the cross.

As the Bible says, we can come joyfully and confident before His very presence, in to His throne room. We can petition Him and we can seek His face. And we can have an audience with the King of all Kings who is far more powerful than the Ahasuerus could even dream of being. And yet we're confident to come before Him through the blood of the Lamb.

Boy, I'm just, I'm so glad about that. If you're one of those people who struggles sometimes with being afraid of God, I want you to, I want to encourage you to get to know the love and mercy and grace of God. And to understand fully,

because I think a person who's afraid of going into His presence does not fully understand what Jesus accomplished for them on the cross.

I'm not saying they're not saved. I believe it's possible for somebody to be a born again Christian and still not fully comprehend exactly what has been accomplished for them on the cross so that they are afraid of God or fear His presence and even reading the word for those people is hard.

Reading scripture is difficult for those people because every time the passage about judgment crosses their path, they become fearful and they see themselves in that.

And that's because they have not fully reconciled the fact that whatever judgment God held over them has been consumed in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross. They don't get that. They haven't fully embraced the fact that their judgment, the judgment that was due them, has been expended. It has been spent.

It has been exhausted on the person of Jesus Christ to the point where Paul says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1) No condemnation. None. Zero. Zilch. Zip. There's none. Right? There's no condemnation.

But there are, you'd be shocked to know how many Christians struggle with condemnation. They feel condemned. And they'll say, well, then why do I feel condemned all the time?

Well, sometimes it's a lack of understanding of the grace of God. Flat out. Sometimes they're being accused by the enemy. The Bible calls the enemy the accuser of the brethren. He accuses them day and night. Not only before God, but to themselves.

The enemy is actively accusing people to them self. And bringing up their faults and all of their issues to the point where they feel condemned. Why do I feel condemned all the time, Pastor? Well, it's because the enemy wants to condemn you and wants you to feel condemned.

Listen, that's not what you're getting from your Heavenly Father. You are not getting condemnation that we know for certain according to the Scripture. But pastor, I feel condemned. Well, it's time to get over your feelings and to replace them with the fact of God's Word. And to put your faith in God's Word and not

in your feelings. Feelings will always lead you astray. Feelings cannot be relied upon. I'm sorry. The heart is deceitful. It's deceitful.

God gave feelings to us as a gift, but there's a problem with feelings. They've now been connected with a sinful nature. Feelings are not evil in and of themselves. God gave feelings to... And I believe feelings are much like flavor in food. God could have given us... Everything we eat could taste like cardboard, or nothing at all. I mean, think about it. Flowers! He didn't have to make them smell nice. Don't you love lilacs? I love walking... I love smelling lilacs. Walking by a lilac bush I'm just like in heaven.

Well, God didn't have to make lilacs smell that way. He didn't have to make food flavorful. Sometimes I wish He hadn't. And, He didn't have to give us the joy of experiencing things. But he wanted us... Feelings were given us to bring color and dimension and purpose to life. And to just be a wonderful response to all that God has given to us.

There's only a problem here though. We became sinners. We became sinners and that joined our feelings. Now our feelings are deceitful. According to Jeremiah the heart of man becomes this deceitful mechanism that now feelings betray us. (Jeremiah 17:9)

And now I feel like you don't like me anymore because of the way... I was just looking at the way you looked at me... And you didn't email me back when I emailed you. And now I feel like you're mad at me. And I feel like God doesn't love me anymore. And I feel like I'm condemned. And I feel, I feel, I feel!

Aaahhh! Don't you get tired sometimes of your feelings? I do, but you know what? I've got the same ones you do. I have feelings but they betray me constantly. They're like a friend who has a problem telling the truth.

Have you ever had one of those people in your life? You met somebody and you realized, wow, I love you, but you're a pathological liar! And it's like everything I hear from you, I'm basically from now on, going to take with a grain of salt. Well, that's the way you and I have to begin to treat our feelings. You have to begin to question them. You have to question them because feelings will lie to you.

God's Word will never lie to you. Listen, I don't care. No, I care. What I'm saying is, it's not important necessarily that you are feeling condemned. What is important is that you believe God's Word that says, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" (Romans 8:1) Do you get

that? That's what we've got to start doing, Christians. We have to start taking our feelings and we have to supplant them with facts based on faith in what God's Word has to say.

I don't feel like God loves me, pastor. Well, does the Bible say, He loves you? Well, yeah, I don't feel like God's hearing my prayers. Well, does it say? He hears your prayers, you pray according to His will and so forth? Yeah Then believe it. And sometimes you got to just press through. Just press through.

And sometimes you got to just quote God's Word. You know what I mean? You got to quote it in the face of feelings that want to say the other thing. You got to just say, you know what? There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I am not condemned. I am not condemned. I am not condemned by God.

God loves me. God hears my prayers. God is for me. God is working all things together for good in my life according to the purpose of His will. You just got to say those things over and over and over until your heart begins to get washed with the Word of God.