

The Beauty Contest: Esther 2:1-18

Scriptures for Today:

Esther 2:1-18 After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. **2** Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: **3** And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: **4** And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so. **5** Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; **6** Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. **7** And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. **8** So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. **9** And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women. **10** Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it. **11** And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. **12** Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;) **13** Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. **14** In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name. **15** Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. **16** So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. **17** And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. **18** Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

Introduction

When you hear the words "**beauty contest**," what comes to mind?

Most people picture women competing based on physical appearance. They think of makeup, expensive dresses, judges scoring contestants, and eventually someone being crowned the winner.

At first glance, Esther chapter 2 looks like that.

The fairest young women in all the land of Persia are gathered together. They spend an entire year preparing themselves. One by one they appear before the king. Finally, one woman receives the crown.

But this is more than just a beauty contest. This is a demonstration of God's faithfulness and His providence.

What is God's providence? Simply put, it is **God working behind the scenes to accomplish His will.**

God is directing events that seem ordinary. He is arranging circumstances that appear to be coincidences. He is putting the right people in the right place at the right time to accomplish His perfect plan.

The people in this story could only see what was happening in front of them. The young women thought they were entering a beauty contest. The king thought he was choosing a new queen. But behind it all, God was quietly preparing **the woman who would one day save His people.**

As we study this passage, here are a few things I want you to think about:

What kind of characteristics does God value most in a person? What kind of person does God choose to use?

Does He value physical beauty? Does He value physical strength? Does He value the amount of knowledge that you have?

I want you to think about that and we'll come back to that question later on. Let's jump right into this passage.

I. A Queen Was Needed (v. 1)

Esther 2:1 After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.

This chapter begins with the statement, **"After these things"** Before we move forward, we need to remember where this story left off. King Ahasuerus, who is the king of Persia, the most powerful empire in the world at the time, made a feast to show off all of his riches and the glory of his kingdom. That feast lasted for 6 months.

After the feast, after unconstrained drinking of wine, the king commanded Queen Vashti to appear before all his princes and nobles so that they could look upon her beauty.

But Vashti refused the king's command.

Because of her refusal, the king became furious. His advisors feared that Vashti's example would spread throughout the empire, so they persuaded the king to remove her as queen and to seek another woman to take her place.

Now some time has passed. The Bible says, **"his wrath...was appeased."** His anger had settled down. He remembered Vashti and what she did. Now he's moving forward with what was previously decreed.

Vashti is being removed. There is a vacancy in the palace. From a human perspective this just looks like political drama. The king wants to find another queen.

But from God's perspective this is more than a vacancy. God's plan is unfolding. Before the main villain enters into this story. Before God's people are threatened. Before anyone realizes they need deliverance, God is already making a way.

The king doesn't know it. His advisors don't know it. But God knows exactly what is taking place. That's why we as believers in Jesus Christ have no need to be anxious about anything in our lives. We can only see today's circumstances, but God already sees tomorrow, next week, next month, next year...

God has a plan in motion. We have nothing to fear when we are His children through faith.

II. The Search Begins (vv. 2-4)

Esther 2:2-4 Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: **3** And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given *them*: **4** And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

Now that there is a vacancy in the palace, the king's servants come up with a solution.

They said, "Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king."

Officers are sent throughout the entire Persian Empire to gather the fairest young women and bring them to Shushan. They will be placed under the care of Hegai, spend months preparing themselves, and eventually one of them will become queen.

To a worldly King, this seemed like a great idea. "I get to choose whichever maiden that pleases me the most". That's what happens when you're lifted up with pride and power.
"I get to have whatever I want"

From God's perspective, He was simply using this to accomplish His plan.
Notice that the king isn't seeking God's will. He isn't praying. He isn't looking for a godly wife.
He's simply searching for the most beautiful woman.

The world has always been captivated by outward beauty. Our world spends billions of dollars every year trying to improve outward appearance. People of all ages are being deceived into thinking that physical attractiveness is a top priority.

Hours upon hours are spent worrying about clothes, hairstyles, jewelry, makeup, fitness, plastic surgery. The world places tremendous value on what can be seen. That is exactly what is happening in this passage.

The qualifications aren't spiritual, they are physical. The search is based on appearance. But while the world searches for outward beauty, God was looking much deeper.

The king thought he was searching for a queen. God already knew who she would be.

This passage also reminds us that this was **never God's design for marriage**.

The king is simply replacing one wife with another. One thing people need to understand is, Marriage isn't like shopping for clothes.
You don't try one on, decide you don't like it anymore, and go looking for another one.

The same also goes for dating...

That's how people treat marriage and their spouses. That's not how marriage works.
From the very beginning, God established marriage to be a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman.

When Adam saw Eve, he didn't say, "Let's see if this works out." God joined them together.

The world's view of relationships has always been disposable. God's view of marriage is covenant. It's lifelong. God hasn't changed or conformed to the culture. His design still stands.

Even though the king isn't seeking God...Even though this process doesn't reflect God's design... God knows what's happening and He's in control.

That doesn't mean God approved of what the king was doing. It means that God can even use the decisions of the ungodly to accomplish His purposes.

God used: Pharaoh to display His power. Nebuchadnezzar to chasten Judah. And now God is going to use King Ahasuerus to place a special young woman exactly where she needs to be.

Sometimes we look at what's happening in our country and in the world around us and we think, "How could God possibly accomplish anything through all this chaos?"

This book reminds us that God is never limited by ungodly governments or ungodly people. He is still working behind the scenes.

While the king was searching for outward beauty. God was preparing inward beauty.

III. God Already Knew (vv. 5–7)

Esther 2:5-7 Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name *was* Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; **6** Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. **7** And he brought up Hadassah, that *is*, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid *was* fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

Now we see a shift in the story. For the first time, we're introduced to the two people who will become the main characters in the rest of the book. The king thinks the search for a new queen is just beginning.

But God's preparation began years earlier. Before the king ever needed a queen... Before the servants ever suggested a search... Before Vashti was ever removed...

God already knew exactly who He would use.

He never has to come up with a backup plan. He never says, "I didn't see that coming."

The Bible first introduces us to Mordecai. He was a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin. (Benjamite) If you know your Bible, who were some famous Benjamites? King Saul. The Apostle Paul.

Then we're told something else. Verse 6 reminds us that Mordecai's family had been carried away into captivity when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah.

From the outside, captivity looks like defeat. It looks like God abandoned His people. But even during the captivity...**God was preserving exactly the people He intended to use.**

Then we're introduced to Esther. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah. She had neither father nor mother. She was an orphan. Again, from the outside it seems very tragic. A child loses both parents. Imagine the uncertainty, the loneliness a child can experience in that situation. Yet, God was still working because Mordecai, who was Esther's cousin, took her as his own daughter.

God used a tragedy to place Esther under the care of the exact man who would guide her throughout this book.

People often question the path God has allowed in their lives? We ask, "why did this happen?", "Why did I have to go through that?", "Why did that innocent child have to die?"

Many times, we never see the answer until years later. Or maybe you won't see the answer during your lifetime. Esther probably didn't realize how God was going to use her.

Mordecai most likely had no idea that faithfully raising one little girl would affect an entire nation. But **God already knew.** That should bring you comfort.

Because He already knows the end from the beginning, we can trust Him even when we don't understand His plan.

IV. Favor Is Found (vv. 8–9)

Esther 2:8-9 So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. **9** And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, *which were* meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best *place* of the house of the women.

Now the search reaches Esther. It doesn't say Esther volunteered. It says, "Esther was brought". She wasn't orchestrating her own future. She wasn't chasing a crown. She simply found herself in the place where God's providence had led her. Sometimes God opens doors that we never would have chosen for ourselves...

If had chosen my own path, I wouldn't be here with you all today. God opens and closes doors. That's what we ought to pray for—not "Lord, let my plans succeed," but, "**Lord, open the doors You want opened, and close the doors You don't want me to walk through.**"

Sometimes He places us in situations that we didn't ask for. Sometimes He leads us down paths we never would have chosen. But He does that because He is accomplishing something greater than we can see.

Notice what happens next. "The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him..." Immediately, Esther finds favor with Hegai. He gives her the things she needs for her purification. He assigns seven maidens to care for her. He gives her the best place in the house of the women.

This is the first of several times in this chapter that Esther finds favor. That isn't an accident. That isn't luck. That isn't coincidence. God was already going before Esther and preparing the way.

Some might think, "Well, of course she found favor. She was beautiful." as it was mentioned in verse 7. But remember, **every young woman brought into the palace was beautiful**. Beauty alone wasn't what made Esther different. So what was it? We're going to find out soon. Let's continue reading.

V. Wisdom Is Displayed (vv. 10–11)

Esther 2:10-11 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew *it*. 11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

Now we begin to see another quality in Esther's life. It says that she had not showed her people nor her kindred, meaning she did not tell anyone that she was a Jew. Mordecai had instructed her not to. And she listened to that instruction.

But why keep that a secret? That answer is not fully answered yet, but as we'll see later in the book, this decision becomes a crucial part of God's plan.

What stands is not simply that Esther kept a secret—it is that **she was willing to receive wise counsel**. She trusted the man who had raised her. She didn't insist on doing things her own way. She didn't assume she knew better. She simply obeyed.

She also demonstrated discretion. Discretion is knowing what to say, when to say it, and sometimes when not to say anything at all. We live in a world where people do not have discretion. Not everything needs to be said. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to remain silent. Esther understood the importance of waiting for God's timing.

Verse 11 also reveals the heart of Mordecai. Every day he walked near the court of the women's house to find out how Esther was doing. Even though he could no longer care for her as he once had, he never stopped caring about her.

VI. The World's Standard (vv. 12–14)

Esther 2:12-14 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, *to wit*, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with *other* things for the purifying of the women;) **13** Then thus came *every* maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. **14** In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

Now the Bible explains the process each young woman went through before appearing before the king. Think about an entire year of purification or preparation.

Six months with **oil of myrrh**—a fragrant resin that was commonly used in the ancient world as a cleansing oil, perfume, and skin treatment. And six months with perfumes, sweet odors, and other beauty preparations.

Then, when it was finally her turn, each young woman was allowed to take **whatever she desired** with her before going in to the king. **vv. 13**

Imagine this great anticipation. This was their one opportunity. Their one chance to become queen. If there was ever a time to wear the finest garments...Choose the most beautiful jewelry...Use the finest perfumes...This was it. These young women could take whatever they desired and thought would make them the most attractive.

Everything about this process emphasized **outward appearance**. That was the world's standard. It wasn't, "Who has the greatest character?" It wasn't, "Who is the wisest?" It wasn't, "Who fears God?" It was, "Who is the most beautiful?"

Verse 14 also reminds us that this was not some fairy-tale pageant. After each young woman spent her night with the king, she was taken to another part of the palace where the king's concubines lived. Unless the king specifically called for her again, she would never return to him. For almost every woman, this meant she would never become queen. She would simply remain in the palace for the rest of her life. This was not God's design for marriage. It reflects the values of a pagan kingdom, not the pattern God established from the beginning.

Our world hasn't really changed much. We still live in a culture that revolves around physical appearances. A culture that treats women like trash that can be discarded. A culture that has brainwashed young men and women to only look at the outside. It's very sad. The only way that it can be fixed is if we get back to the Word of God. Put away Instagram, put away social media, put away Hollywood. Put away the fantasy worlds and false expectations. Get back to reality. And understand the Will of God.

So remember, every young woman that went before the king was physically beautiful. Every one of them went through the same twelve months of preparation. Every one of them had the same opportunity to choose whatever she desired before appearing before the king.

So what made Esther different? It wasn't the myrrh. It wasn't the perfumes. It wasn't the jewelry. It wasn't the clothing. The answer is found in the very next verse.

VII. True Beauty (v. 15)

Esther 2:15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

Now we finally have the answer. Remember the question we asked at the very beginning of the sermon. **What kind of characteristics does God value most in a person? What made Esther different?**

The answer wasn't her appearance. It wasn't her choice of clothing, or jewelry, or makeup. It's found in one simple statement: **"She required nothing."** Isn't that awesome?

Every young woman was allowed to take whatever she desired. But Esther was different. She took nothing. Why?

Because she wasn't trying to outsmart everyone else. She wasn't trying to outshine everyone else. She wasn't trying to draw attention to herself.

She was humble. She was content. She was teachable. She wasn't driven by self-promotion.

She didn't think, "I know exactly what will please the king"

She quietly followed the instruction she had been given.

The world tells us: "Promote yourself", "Get people to notice you.", "Stand out from the crowd.", "Elevate yourself."

But God's way is different. Jesus said, **And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. Matthew 23:12**

God isn't looking for people who are full of themselves. He's looking for people who will humble themselves and put their trust in Him. That is true beauty.

1 Peter 3:3-4 Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; **4** But *let it be* the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Esther obtained favour in the sight of all. Was it simply because she was physically beautiful? No, she obtained favor because God exalted her above all the other women. Because of her humility. Because of her meek and quiet spirit.

VIII. God Exalts the Humble (vv. 16–18)

Esther 2:16-18 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. **17** And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. **18** Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, *even Esther's feast*; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

Finally, the moment the entire chapter has been building toward arrives. Esther is crowned queen. From the king's perspective, he had simply found the woman who pleased him most. But from God's perspective, this had been His plan all along. This wasn't luck. It wasn't coincidence. It was the providence of God.

Think about everything God had already done. He preserved Mordecai through the captivity. He brought Esther into Mordecai's home after the death of her parents. He placed her in the palace. He gave her favor with Hegai. He gave her favor with all who looked upon her. And now, He places the royal crown upon her head.

To everyone else, this looked like the end of a beauty contest. But God wasn't simply crowning a queen—**He was positioning a deliverer**. Before anyone knew there would be a crisis, God already had a plan. Before His people ever needed saving, God already had Esther on the throne.

--That ought to encourage every one of us. Even through undesirable circumstances, painful losses, unanswered questions, and difficult seasons of life, **God is still working all things together for good to them that love Him, to them who are called according to His purpose**. We may not understand what He's doing today, but one day we'll look back and see that He was preparing us all along.

--So if you want to be different in this world, don't follow the ways of the world. The world says to impress people, promote yourself, and focus on the outward appearance. God says to walk in humility, to be teachable, to trust Him. **Don't live to impress men. Live to impress God.**

The world may celebrate outward beauty, but God delights in inward beauty. And just as He did with Esther, God is able to use humble people who are willing to trust Him and follow His leading. Let's Pray.