



JESUS HAS A BETTER KINGDOM

Part 2 of Esther

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Esther 1:10–22 | September 21, 2012

XERXES LOVED HIS THRONE

Oh, Xerxes loved his throne. I feel like I'm on a TBN set. Xerxes loved to sit on his throne. We read that in chapter 1 of Esther. From his throne, he would give orders across the largest empire in the history of the world to that day, the mighty Persian nation. It covered roughly 3 million square miles, about the same size as the United States of America. He ruled over multiple previous people groups, languages, nations, and cultures that his father had overtaken as king and granted to him rulership over as the one who inherited the throne.

He was in his mid-thirties; by all accounts tall, dark, and handsome; and he had so much wealth that he was continually surrounded with nothing but opulence. Defending him were ten thousand bodyguards called the Immortals. Surrounding him were the most learned men in the day. People would come to meet him and pass before him, and to proceed before the throne of Xerxes meant that you had to bow down and worship him like a god.

If someone tried to sit upon his throne, they were executed. If they tried to even stand upon the rug in front of his throne, they were executed. He loved his throne so much that he would throw large, lavish parties and just sit upon his throne while people gazed at his glory and sang his praises. Women would be paraded before him so that he could choose whichever one was most interesting to him for that day. And when his army of a few million would ride off into battle, he would be carried on his throne to a high point near the battlefield where he could simply sit on his throne and observe the victories of his soldiers, including their defeat in Greece.

And as we examine this study of Esther and we look at this great book of the Bible, the first chapter is really dedicated to this man, Xerxes, Xerxes the Great. And the big image we are given is that he is one who sits on a throne, and so the themes of king and kingdom are to awaken our imagination and to cause us to wonder, "Is this the best we can get for a king?" and "Is this the best kingdom that there is for us?"

1. ADDICTIONS ARE FED

So, as I try and get off my throne without hurting myself—my feet don't even touch the ground. We'll be in Esther 1:10, and we're going to examine this great kingdom and this quote unquote "great king." We learn three things. Number one, that addictions are fed by this king in his kingdom, and he is, in every way, a portrait of what the Bible elsewhere calls "the world."

The world is not just the physical planet that God made, it's the spiritual temperature and attitude of those who live on the earth but don't know God, those who live in a quote unquote "worldly" way. And Xerxes and his kingdom, they represent worldliness, and one of the first things we learn about this worldly kingdom is that in it, addictions are fed.

We read chapter 1, verse 10, "On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine." So, what's been happening to this point, Xerxes has been seated on his throne, and over the course of six months he's had this enormous, lavish, extravagant party, open bar, all you can eat, all you can drink. Perhaps fifteen thousand men were present. The women met separately with Queen Vashti. That meant that the only women who were present with the men were those women who were hired because of ill repute.

This is a very disgusting, degrading, debasing, demoralizing event, and it continues with primarily military personnel. So, just get your mind around this. King on a throne, women not present, open bar, fifteen thousand soldiers, all you can eat and drink, no rules, six months. It's absolute sin, unleashed, unhinged.

And then it ends with an even larger party for one week where more guests are invited, and it says that at this point, not only were the guests overconsuming, the king was, himself, "merry with wine." That's a way of saying he had too much to drink. How many of you have had too much to drink? Don't raise your hand. There was racing. You're going to hurt the person next to you with your elbow.

But just so you know, drinking doesn't make you smarter. Amen? See, when you're drinking, you feel smarter, and then you wake up, you can't find your car keys, pants, bail money. You realize, "I wasn't that smart." And they had that myth as well. In that day, the men would gather, they would drink, make decisions, then sleep on it, because they thought that when they drank, they got clearer thinking and closer to the gods. It's not true. See, drinking is not a sin, but overconsumption always is. It's drunkenness.

And so here, what we are seeing is men who are overconsuming, and the result is that they start to make some very bad decisions, and that's what we do when we overdrink. Right? Drinking never helped anyone accomplish anything important.

The first thing we see, though, is that addictions are fed, and you need to know that again, here, Xerxes, and his kingship, and his kingdom being symbolic and representative of the world. This is how the world still works, the world system. This is corporate flesh, human depraved nature, aligning together, empowered by Satan and demons to cause people to sin against God. That's worldliness.

And the way the world works is this: it doesn't make you do things you hate, it helps you do things you love, and things that are bad, and things that are wrong, and things that are

addicting and enslaving. Satan still works this way. He will give you whatever you want as long as he gets to be your king and as long as you serve his kingdom. Sex? Fine. Xerxes gave it, Satan will too. Drink? Fine. Xerxes gave it, Satan will too. Overconsumption? Absolutely. You're welcome to not just partake but overconsume, and that's okay. That's okay with Xerxes, that's okay with Satan.

The way that various kings and kingdoms, the way that a worldly system works, it's always the same because whether it's Xerxes on the throne, or Pharaoh on the throne or it's Nero on the throne, or it's Hugh Hefner on the throne—whoever's sitting on the throne ruling from their little kingdom trying to amass for themselves a lot of honor, and fame, and power, and glory, they will give to others whatever it is that they want as long as they get to be the king and those people are obedient citizens of their kingdom.

You need to know that, that the whole world is a trap. And some of you will get frustrated because you think, "God said no, and I want yes." Satan always says yes because he doesn't love you like a father loves his children. And the way a father loves his children, he says no. He says no when they're going to do something that is going to harm them or others. But again, Xerxes here is a portrait of the world, and his kingdom is a portrait of the world, and the way it worked is the way it always works.

Those who love you most will sometimes tell you no. Those who are part of the world system will not only give you what you want, they will give you what you want to excess, to your own addiction, to your own destruction. God loves us enough to say no. There is no father who only always says yes to every request of a child. Xerxes is, in that way, like Satan, in that he is giving away what people want, not what they need. The first thing we learn about this king and his kingdom is that addictions are fed.

2. MEN ARE CASTRATED

Number two, men are castrated. Men are castrated. I'll read it for you. "He commanded—" and these guys got names. "Mehuman—" That's kind of a rapper name, I was thinking, like, ancient Persian hip-hop artist, Mehuman. That's how it's spelled. "Biztha." Sounds like a sidekick. "Harbona, Bigtha." That's my personal favorite. If I had to pick a Persian name, Bigtha. Definitely not Littletha. I would totally go with Bigtha. "Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas."

Okay, a couple things here. The Bible talks about real people, real circumstances, real history. That's why they're facts. It's not just philosophy. Number two, if you ever have an opportunity to teach the Bible and you hit some of the parts with the old, crazy names, read fast and confident. No one knows how to pronounce them, and they'll just assume you do.

Here are these guys. So, you've got seven guys, "the seven eunuchs." What's a eunuch? A guy who used to have a good life, and joy, and hope. That's the technical definition of a eunuch. A eunuch is a man who is castrated. Proceeding with the story before I have to fire myself.

"The seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus." That's his Persian name. His Greek name is Xerxes. So, here's how it works. In an effort to show how great, and glorious, and grand he was, Xerxes had multiple wives, practiced polygamy. He also had a harem filled with concubines and other women. Perhaps none of them were chosen because of mutual love and affection. He was in his mid-thirties and he would see a young woman that he found was attractive and he would bring her into the harem. But, she might live with hundreds, maybe thousands of other women in the palace. Perhaps never see her quote unquote "husband."

Sometimes women were chosen for solely political purposes, meaning he would want to expand his empire into another nation, and so he would marry one of the king's daughters, and then they would create a new family and then that woman's father would be a political leader within his kingdom and he would overtake it not by force, but by intermarriage.

Horrible things happen when marriage is centered on something other than love. When we marry for sexual pleasure, when we marry for convenience or comfort, when we marry because there is money to be made, either by the woman marrying an affluent man or the man marrying into a rich family or a hard-working, successful woman—any time the motivation is financial, it's political, it's personal, it's not love, crisis is sure to ensue, and that's exactly what is happening here.

And to ensure that these women, many of whom would only see him perhaps once in their life—to ensure that they were not going to fall in love, that they would not be married and have children, the only men who were allowed to serve in the presence of the harem, and the concubines, and the polygamist nature of the palace were men who had been castrated. Men who had been castrated.

So, number one, we know that in this kingdom, addictions are fed. Number two, in this kingdom, men are castrated. You know that Satan is at work when people do whatever they want, and children are not considered a blessing, and marriage and children are discouraged. Some things never change. They didn't allow the children to be born, neither do we. They just prevented it before the conception.

3. WOMEN ARE MISTREATED

Number three, women are mistreated. We all saw this coming. Right? One guy sits on a throne, all the military guys party with him for six months, open bar, women are turned into the harem, men are castrated, women are mistreated.

So, what happens is he's seated upon his throne, and here's the grand finale. He's been seated on his throne for the better part of six months. At the conclusion of the enormous party, the guest list increases for a week, and here's the grand finale. He's going to make a request: "To bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown."

Some of the ancient commentators, the targums, the Midrash, they say that he may be asking her to wear only her crown. It wouldn't have been like a queen's crown like we're used to from British royalty, more like a turban with jewels in it, but Vashti is the queen.

"In order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at." So, here's the deal. He picked Vashti because she was beautiful. He's drunk, everyone's drunk, all the women are alone having their party, the men are having their party, and he is seated on his throne and he decides, "It's time to show off my beautiful wife."

So, he calls for Queen Vashti, and you've got to hear it this way, right? I hear it like Don Knotts after a weekend at Charlie Sheen's house, okay? He says it like this: "Get me Vashti! Get Vashti!" Okay? Just think of the guy who's just really drunk, out of control. At this point, he's on his throne, but he's probably sideways. You know? Kind of hanging off the throne. You've got to see him in that light. "Get Vashti!" Maybe all the military guys are cheering, "We want to see the queen! We want to see the queen! Go get her."

Now, we don't know what she's wearing. Some indicate that she's underdressed or perhaps the request is that she would come undressed. How many of you women, that doesn't

sound like a good day? The guys have been drunk for six months. Your husband is hammered and wants you to come and do a bit of a stroll in front of a bunch of drunk soldiers. Okay?

Now, some of you guys are single and crazy, and you'll think, "Well, that sounds like a good idea, you know? That's not a bad idea, that's just like a swimsuit competition or a Miss America competition where they come out on stage, or the Hooters girls, or the Hawaiian Tropic." Let me tell you, once you become a dad, everything looks different. Amen? You're a single guy, your head is wrong. Everything you think is wrong. Okay? You become a dad and you have a daughter, you're just like, "Everyone needs to die. Everyone there needs to die." These men should all get part-time jobs as crash test dummies. We should just run them into walls and see what happens. Okay?

VASHTI'S DECISION

So, what's Queen Vashti going to do? How many of you ladies, this would be a hard situation? Right? And some of you ladies are like, "The Bible says, 'Wives submit to your husbands.'" Ladies, should she submit? Yes or no? Okay. Some of the women say no. How many women say she should submit to her husband? Let's see what she does. Okay. Wow, that was a pretty staggeringly unanimous vote we just had right there. Right?

"But—" But! Oh, you know it's going to go good now. "But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command." Not much of a command. Right? "Delivered by the eunuchs." I feel sorry for these seven guys, right? Can you imagine that? You're like, "Mom, I got a job!" "As what?" "As a eunuch." "Aww, really? No grandkids? Okay, well, congratulations on the job."

And then the king says, "Alright, you seven eunuchs go tell the queen to come parade before me and the boys." The seven eunuchs go over to Queen Vashti, "Alright, it's time for you to come and parade before—" "Tell him to stuff it." "But he thinks he's the Lord God. He sits on a throne." "Tell him to stuff it. Tell the Lord to stuff it." "Okay. What's he going to do to us? I mean, it can't get any worse. You know? Alright, King. She says, 'Stuffeth this.'" You know? That's what she says.

"At this the king became angry." Drunk and angry. Oh, that's what we need, more drunk, angry guys. That's always a good idea. "And his anger burned within him." Why? Because he's humiliated. He's humiliated.

Now, the debate is this: did Vashti do a good thing or a bad thing? There's no indication she's a believer. If she has any religious convictions, she's probably Zoroastrian. She doesn't worship the God of the Bible, so we're not saying that she's a godly woman, you know? But what we are saying is she made a very brave decision. The question is was it a good or a bad decision, a moral or an immoral decision?

And Jewish commentators, Christian commentators, they've debated this throughout history. Some think, "Well, that was not a good idea. Wives are supposed to submit to their husbands, and obey their husbands, and respect their husbands, and defer to their husbands, and what happened here was, you know, he gave a decree and she said no, and that happened publicly in front of all the other men. She humiliated and shamed her husband, and a woman should never do that." Even the great Martin Luther used this as a bit of an example on how a woman shouldn't act. How many of you would take that perspective? You'd say, "Yeah, she should submit to her husband. She should obey her husband. She should respect her husband."

How many of you say, "No. No way. What she did was a good thing, and a godly thing, and a noble thing, and an honorable thing, and a moral thing because what he asked her to do was reprehensible. And if your husband is a dolt and he asks you to do something and you do it, you're just joining him in his folly." How many of you that would be more your perspective?

Women's Bible studies, you can kick it around this week, talk it through, right? Your Community Groups, talk it through, figure it out. The Bible does say that a woman should love, and respect, and honor, and obey her husband. It actually uses those words. Some of you women are okay with it, some of you it's like water on a cat, not so happily received, but that's what it does say.

Here's what I believe. I believe that Vashti made a noble, courageous, brave, moral decision. She stood up to a guy who was never stood up to. Nobody ever told him no. I mean, they thought that the sun spoke through this guy. They thought he was god-man, and Vashti says, "No. He's just nasty man and he's asking me to do something nasty." It's in the Hebrew. "And that's nasty, and I don't want to be nasty, and I don't want to do nasty, and just because he's nasty, I'm going to say no to Mr. Nasty." I believe she made a good decision. I believe she made the right decision.

FOR THE MEN

Now, let me use this as a teaching opportunity. For the men—okay, I'll hammer the men first, like nails. Okay. Number one, men, what is your standard of beauty? Your wife. Okay? We hit this in *Real Marriage*, but God made Adam and Eve, and he didn't give Adam or Eve a list of options. Tall, short, skinny, not so skinny, you know, long hair, short hair, you know, great breath, whew, melts things. You know? You didn't have a list of options. What God gave Adam was a woman or an aardvark. Woman looked amazing. For Eve, he gave Adam. That's it.

So, God didn't give them a standard of beauty. He gave them a spouse. God doesn't give us a standard of beauty. He gives us a spouse, and our spouse is our standard of beauty. And here's the problem. Xerxes thinks his wife is beautiful. That's not a problem. But he wants to parade her in front of all the other men so they can ogle her and then become covetous, commit adultery, lust of the heart, compare their wives to his wife.

It's like pornography, and swimsuit issues, and advertising, and marketing today. It's to get men to compare, wrongly, their wife to another woman and then have a standard of beauty that is someone other than their wife, and then be guilty of lust and adultery of the heart. Men, our standard of beauty is our wife. Wives, your standard of beauty is your husband. This is the way God made marriage. This is God's intention.

Horrible things happen, and we can look at these men and we can say, "Oh, these are nasty men." Some men do the same thing, rather than having the financial wherewithal, though, to parade an actual woman, we just do it digitally, and we do it privately, and we do it shamefully. The times have changed, but the hearts of men have not.

So, practically, that means if your spouse is tall, you're into tall. If your spouse is short, you're into short. If your spouse is skinny, you're into skinny. If your spouse is formerly skinny, you're into formerly skinny. Alright? If your husband has hair, you love hair. If he loses his hair, you hate hair. Your spouse is your standard of beauty.

Number two, your wife is not a trophy to be paraded around for other men to ogle. Right? Let's say, ladies, you're dating a guy and he says, "Hey, put on that dress that doesn't fit where the neckline and the hemline meet. That's my favorite one, because we're going to go to my buddy's party, and I want all the guys to see you looking your best." Stay home. Right? Hang out with Jesus, the one guy who doesn't ask you to act like that.

Some men like to dress up their wives and parade them around so that other men would be impressed by their trophy. That's a godless thing, it's a horrible thing, it's a denigrating, disrespectful, damaging thing, and Vashti says, "No. I will not do that. I will not do that."

I want you men to really check your heart, even when you go out in public with your wife. Do you want her to appear a certain way and is that because you like her to be a trophy that demonstrates something of your greatness and glory? If so, there's something wrong with you. There's something amiss with you, and that's the heart of King Xerxes.

Number three, your wife should be your best friend. Alright, we talked about this in *Real Marriage*, but when God made Adam, he said, "It was not good for the man to be alone, so he made Eve to be his wife, and his partner, and his friend." Grace and I like to always say that one of the most important aspects of marriage is friendship.

If they truly were friends—let's say that Vashti and Xerxes were friends, would he treat her like this? Yes or no? No way. You don't do this to your friend. You don't objectify your friend, you don't denigrate your friend, you don't parade your friend, you don't in any way put your friend in harm's way. This is what happens when marriage is about the money, when marriage is about the sex, when marriage is about the power and it's not about the friendship. The way to mitigate this is always be working on "the closest human friendship you have is with your spouse." See, Xerxes has innumerable women and zero friendships with any woman. God wants us to have one spouse and be friends with them.

Number four, and I want you men to really take this to heart: Xerxes has many sons. If we're going to look at Xerxes and say, "He's nasty," we have to also say, "And we're like him." Otherwise, we get into a moralism where he's a bad guy, we're a good guy. The truth is, we know his nastiness, they just haven't written ours down and publicized it, so we don't have an opportunity to be criticized as we criticize him.

From swimsuit issues, to men's magazines, to pornography, to, you know, the fashion industry, to marketing and advertising, to naughty coffee stands, to cheerleaders, to Hooters girls, to Miss America. I mean, the list goes on, and on, and on, and on, and on. Xerxes has many sons, and some of them wait until they're in their power years, forties and fifties, where they make some money, and then what do they do? They get rid of their wife of their youth, and then they go after the youngest, most attractive woman they can afford. And in places like California where we've got a church, it's an absolute crisis and epidemic, because it's not about the friendship, it's not about the love. It's about Xerxes' sons wanting trophies on their arms. So, men, this is a wake up call for all of us. Amen?

You need to know that our hearts, all of us, incline toward the same things, male and female. We look at Xerxes. His heart is inclined toward money. Do you love money? The Bible doesn't say anything good about lovers of money. Do you love power? Do you love comfort? Do you love drink? Do you love food? Do you love sex? Then we're a lot like Xerxes.

FOR THE WOMEN

Ladies, a couple things for you. Number one, submission does not include submitting to things that are degrading and/or humiliating or endangering. If your husband's asking you to disobey the Lord, he's not the highest authority. This is the good news of Christianity. Above the king is the King of kings. Above your husband is the Lord of lords.

Men only have derivative authority. Leaders in any capacity, male or female, only have derivative authority, not innate authority. So, a husband, a father, he doesn't have innate authority. He has derivative authority. It's borrowed from the Lord, and if he's disobeying, disregarding, dishonoring the Lord, well, then he should not be obeyed. Because the highest authority says no, and he says yes, then the answer is no. So, ladies, if your husband asks you to lie, to steal, to cover for him, to participate with him in some sin, or evil, or injustice, or crime, the answer is what? No.

So, my second point is some of you ladies need to learn how to stand up for yourself and say no. And I know, you're just like, "Mark Driscoll said that. That is crazy. That is unbelievable. I did not think that was possible." We believe in the whole counsel of God's Word. We believe that everything in the Scripture should be obeyed, and the worst thing is when we only take some of what the Bible says and then we impose it on people.

The Bible does say respect, obey, honor your husband. Submit to him. The Bible also tells the husbands to love their wives, to honor the Lord, to obey the Scriptures, to be under the authority of the elders in the church, and to be under the authority of the government.

And ladies, sometimes the godliest thing is to say no. I believe what Vashti did was noble, it was brave, it was good, it was right. And some of you ladies, you've mastered the art of saying no. Like, you're—you could, like, teach a grad school class on how to jam up a man. Right? I mean, you landed the dismount. Boom, nailed it again. You're really good at it. Okay?

Now, some of you ladies have never even tried. You're always like, "Yes, okay. Whatever you say. Whatever you want." No, pick your chin up. Look him in the eye. "No! No." I've seen this repeatedly, where there's a foolish man with a wise woman and her not speaking is not helping. Ladies, use a loving voice, use a respectful voice, use a godly voice, but don't lose your voice. And sometimes, a woman has to prayerfully, carefully just say no. Vashti says what? No.

Number three, for the ladies, if your boyfriend wants you to underdress, dump him. Okay? If your husband wants you to underdress, dress in multiple layers to the glory of God. Get flannel over flannel over flannel with a coat over a coat. Okay? We do live in a day where some guys really want to cause their women to be objectified, and the answer is no.

Especially if you're dating him, stop dating him. Right now, he's on his best behavior. I'll give you a moment to dump him while I get some water. I'm not kidding. This is efficient. It beats having a bunch of meetings.

THE "WISE" MEN

Alright, back to the Scriptures. Verse 13: “Then the king said to the wise men.” Just so you know, these are not the wisest men. Right? It’s Larry, Curly, and Moe. This is his cabinet. “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, the men next to him being—” And here are their names, because it shows that God works in history: “Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king’s face,” so they had access to his presence, “and sat first in the kingdom).”

So, these are big guys. This is his cabinet. He sits in a huge throne and they sit on little thrones alongside of him. All very—you know, “We’re his cabinet. We’re versed in law. We’re the wise men,” overseeing the six-month drunken frat party. Just so you know, these are the wise men. And that’s what it says on their resume, but there’s no evidence to hold up in court that these are wise men.

Verse 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?” This gets all very official. Alright, so, Larry, Curly, Moe, they all meet. “First we must look, was legal process followed?” “Yes, yes. “The seven sad eunuchs took the news to the queen, and they requested on behalf of the king that she come and parade before the drunken men, and she said no. And it’s all confirmed. We have witnesses, we wrote it down. It’s very serious. We called a meeting, there was a committee, there were things written down.” Alright? “A guy with a big hat confirmed it. It’s all very legitimate.”

Now it’s turned into an international crisis. This is the most powerful man who rules over 3 million square miles and can’t handle a wife. How many of you guys are like, “That explains my whole life”? Okay. The story continues.

“Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, ‘Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong.’” Oh, it’s much worse than that. This has now been tweeted, and it’s really—it’s trending. It’s trending in the Hebrew. “But also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.”

“This is a crisis. When she told you no, all of a sudden a lot of women realized that’s a good word. Little but powerful. ‘No.’ They’ve been practicing it all day at home, waiting for their husband to return from work. ‘No. No. No!’ The women are all practicing. We have the makings of an outbreak. This is an epidemic. Next thing you know, fools won’t get their way. Oh, what will we do?”

“For the queen’s behavior,” verse 17, “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.’”

Can you see this? These very powerful men: “Well, you know, King, if we don’t do something, we’re all jerks like you, and our wives are all frustrated like yours, and if yours tells you to stuff it, ours are going to tell us to stuff it. This is now a crisis.” You see the comedy? What happens is sometimes rulers, kings, those in power, those in authority, those who are rich and famous, they take themselves so seriously, but they’re silly. They’re silly. This is silly.

What’s going to happen? Is Vashti going to back down? “I’m sorry. I apologize. Let me send out a press release. Okay, ladies, we’ll all do what we’re told.” Is she going to hold to her guns?

IF YOU’RE WRONG, REPENT

Well, let’s read. “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.” Any time men have to impose respect on women just goes to show that the men aren’t respectable. Right?

Men, let me say this. At your house, if you have to keep pulling out all the “Obey me,” verses, maybe she just doesn’t respect you because you’re not respectable. There are easier ways to deal with these sorts of situations.

Here’s something that Xerxes never does: repent. Let me ask you this: is Xerxes right or wrong—let me just set this up so it’s an easy vote for us—to request that his wife parade underdressed or undressed in front of maybe fifty to one hundred thousand drunk guys? You think that was a good or a bad request by the great King Xerxes? Oh, and he made that decision while drunk. We all agree, right? If we took a vote right now, you’d say bad decision.

So, what should he do? Apologize. “Sweetheart, I’m sorry. I was drunk. I shouldn’t have been drunk. I was with the guys. I shouldn’t have been with those guys. They all started doing the wave. ‘Get Queen Vashti!’ Next thing I know, we’ve got ourselves a little Persian wave going on, and out of fear of man and cowardice, I asked you to come and to parade before the drunken soldiers, and I’m sorry. That was wrong. Please forgive me.” It would have been over, right? Would it have been over? Probably so.

Instead, he remains unrepentant. Okay, now, again, we read the story, and what we need to do is continually ask ourselves, “How am I like Xerxes? How am I self-righteous? How am I stubborn? How do I want the world to rotate around me? Where am I trying to put my throne? What kingdom am I trying to build? In what ways am I foolish and where in my life am I unrepentant?”

Let me say this: when we’re wrong, we should repent. It doesn’t matter if you’re more powerful, you should repent. It doesn’t matter if you’re the boss, you should repent to the employees. It doesn’t matter if you’re the husband, you should repent to the wife. It doesn’t matter if you’re the parent, you should repent to the kids. It doesn’t matter if you’re the pastor, you should repent to the congregation. It just doesn’t matter. If you’re the president, you should repent to the voters. If you’re in charge, it doesn’t mean you’re right, and good leadership is demonstrating humility. Good leadership is demonstrating repentance.

Repentance is where we acknowledge, “I’m just wrong. I could make a lot of excuses, reasons. I could get a whole bunch of people together. I could get a bunch of people who agree with me and think like me, and some of them are highly educated and have degrees, and I could quote books, and we could bring in a professional, and we could write things down, we could make it look very official, but at the end of the day, I just have a hard heart.”

Is that you, friend? I’ll tell you, at times in my life, it’s been me. Everything gets really hard and complicated when people remain unrepentant, especially people in positions of authority, and we all have some place that we are in authority.

Here's what happens when we don't repent: we defend ourselves. How many of you have done this? You get a friend, and another friend, and somebody who's like you, and somebody who agrees with you, and somebody who isn't going to check the facts, and you bring them together, and you CC them on the e-mail, you put it on the website, you post it on your Facebook wall, you bring them together for coffee.

"Oh it's a prayer—I have a prayer request." You know? "I have a prayer request. My husband's a jackalope. And, you know, all your husbands are jackalopes. We should pray for each other. Well, I got your back, girl. Okay. Here we go. Here we go. Here we go. Just fire up the carnival music. Ding, ding, ding. Here we go."

And that's what's happening here. He's unrepentant, so he starts to build a case. You know what unrepentant people do? They build cases. How do I know? I build great cases. Well, here's his case: "I'm the king, she's not. I sit on a throne, she doesn't. I rule over the world, she's lucky to have me. I give orders and everybody obeys, she should have obeyed. She's my wife. What right does she have to say no to me? And she's humiliated me in front of the men. How can I rule as a king without my dignity intact? Oh yes, and the men are right. If she defies me, then we'll have anarchy and corruption. She's taking down the whole empire."

Isn't it amazing how one unrepentant person can build a case that sounds pretty convincing? Satan is not only a deceiver, he also helps us to deceive ourselves. What do you need to repent of? What do you need to just own and say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry"? He would have had a totally different kingdom if he was a humble king like Jesus. But he's not a humble king, he's a proud king.

Well, what's going to happen? Here's what they say. Verse 19: "If it pleases 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." So, the law of the Medes and the Persians. You've probably heard of that. It means once this law is enacted by the king, it's irreversible.

"That Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus." Now, is it just me, or does that seem funny? Okay. "Vashti," the seven eunuchs say, "the king wants to see you." "I don't want to see him." And the king says, "She can never see me again." "Okay! That's what I asked for." Do you see the humor in this? It's ridiculous. Her punishment is to never see him. It's like, "You did what? Here's ice cream!" You're like, "Okay!" What a punishment.

Some of you don't know this. The Bible is occasionally funny. It's not always funny, but sometimes it's funny, and sometimes people take themselves seriously, and they don't take God seriously, and so sometimes God uses a little irony and sarcasm. And if we can laugh at sinners, then we could start laughing at ourselves, and we could stop taking ourselves so seriously, and stop taking others so seriously, and start taking God more seriously. I mean, this guy's supposed to be God, right? I'm not impressed. I mean, it doesn't even seem like he minored in that in college. He's just not very good at it.

"And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she." What is their definition of a good wife? One who remains silent and just does what she's told. The wife was originally created, Genesis 2, to be a what? A helper. A wife who only always says nothing or yes is not very helpful. He doesn't want a helper or a friend. He basically wants an obedient pet. Right? Full obedience is something you want from a dog or a horse, not a spouse.

"So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast," they're boasting on him, "all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." The easiest way for a husband to have his wife honor and respect him is to be honorable and respectable, not to get a bunch of dudes to vote for something that is incongruous with a man's conduct.

"This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people."

This is like Bible. This is like Scripture. So Xerxes is seated on his throne, and he sends out a decree, and when he says it, it's "Thus saith the Lord." That's how it's received, and then they write it down, just like Scripture's written down. And then they say, "Okay, we need to get it to all the people." So now, all of a sudden, we're making copies. It's called transmission. And some people speak a different language, so we need to translate it. That's translation.

Xerxes here is trying to write a little book of the Bible to cover his own sin, because that's what false gods do, and he wants it to be sent to all peoples in their native language, read and obeyed. We call that the Word of God. This is not the Word of God. This is the word of a false god. This is the word of a false king. This is the word of a horrible kingdom.

And let me say this: there's a difference between that which is legal and that which is holy, and in that day, they thought that their king was kind of like a god as well, and so it was all corrupted and it was intermingled.

Let me say this: above every king, and every president, and ever dictator, and every ruler is another King, and he alone gives laws that never change. And his laws, too, are written down, and they are sent out, and they are translated, and they are to be obeyed, and we call that the Scriptures, the Word of God.

And what happens here is that Xerxes sends out a law that is unholy. This is so important for God's people to distinguish. Something can be legal and immoral. Something can be permissible in the state's eyes and reprehensible in the Lord's eyes. Do you get that? Adultery is not a crime, it's a sin. The murder of the unborn is not a crime, it's a sin. The redefining of marriage is not a crime, it's a sin. And it doesn't matter what laws the state makes, we answer to a higher law.

The laws of the state always change. Only God rules with the law of the Medes and the Persians. Only God is always right. Only God never makes a mistake. Only God never speaks an errant word. Only God is unchanging. Only God is perfect, and holy, and righteous, and glorious, and good. And when God gives a sovereign decree, and it is written down, and it is transmitted, and it is translated, it is to be obeyed by everyone, everywhere.

But what continually happens in that kingdom, in our kingdom, is people don't want to repent. And so, like Xerxes, we like to rewrite the laws. We like to reinterpret the laws that God has already given. We don't write Scripture. We don't rewrite Scripture. We repent and obey. We repent and obey.

JESUS HAS A BETTER KINGDOM

What has happened at this point in the story is the door is now open for Esther. Vashti exits stage right. The question is: who's the queen going to be? This leaves the door open, stage

left, for Esther to make her entrance. We will get there eventually, but let me say that this theme of kings and kingdoms, it leaves us aching, and longing, and wanting for more.

Xerxes was the greatest king in the history of the world to his day, but every generation has chased the same foolish myth: if we could just get a good king and have a good kingdom, then we'd have a heavenly life on a fallen earth. It doesn't matter if his name is Pharaoh, or his name is Nero, or it's a duchess and a duke, or it's someone who is a president or a vice president. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter whether they assume the throne or they're elected to the throne. When fallen, faulty, flawed sinners sit on a throne, you never get a glorious kingdom. You never get a glorious kingdom.

And some of us, we think, "If I could sit on the throne, I would have a glorious kingdom." You and I would do the same thing as Xerxes given the opportunity and power. We would pursue fame, and money, and glory, and comfort, and sex, and food, and drink. We would not pursue the glory of God and the good of others. No one is fit to sit upon that throne.

There is a great, aching need at this point in human history. It is crying out, "Where is one to sit on the throne? Is there another king? Is there another kingdom? Is there more hope? Is there any help? Will a king come?" And this is one of the last books of the Old Testament, and there are four hundred silent years, and the heart of God's people is aching, and quaking, yearning. "Where is a king? Where is a king?"

And he's high and exalted, and he's ruling, seated on a throne, and he does something that Xerxes never did. He got off his throne, and he came down to this confused, fallen, flawed, failed world, and he came not to take, but to give. He came not to enslave us, but to free us. And so the story of Esther falls within the storyline of the Scriptures that's all about Jesus, and if we don't allow Jesus to come into the story through the themes of king and kingdom, all we're left with is moralism. Xerxes was a bad guy, Esther was a good girl. Be like Esther, not like Xerxes. That's not enough. The Bible's not just good news for what we can do; it's good news for what God has done.

And so the heart's cry here is, "There has to be a better kingdom. There has to be a better king." Xerxes sat on his throne, feeding sin, and our King Jesus got off his throne to forgive sin. Amen? Xerxes appealed to our depraved nature, King Jesus comes to give us a new nature. Amen? King Xerxes' words are no longer read and obeyed, but King Jesus' words will forever be read and obeyed. Amen? Xerxes gave people what they want, King Jesus gives people what they need. Amen?

Xerxes banished his people from his presence, King Jesus never banishes any of his people from his presence. Amen? Xerxes paraded his wife degradingly, King Jesus, at the end of time, parades his wife spotless, pure, gloriously. Amen? Xerxes no longer sits upon a throne, but King Jesus sits high and exalted, risen from death, ascended into glory, forever upon his throne. Amen? Xerxes died and his people died, King Jesus rose and his people will rise to be with him forever. Amen? And Xerxes' kingdom has come to an end, but King Jesus' kingdom never comes to an end. Amen? Alright! Let's honor our king.

Lord Jesus, you are high and exalted. Right now, Revelation tells us over, and over, and over, you're high, you're exalted, you're seated upon a throne. The nations surround you. They cry out worshiping you day and night. The angels join them. Lord Jesus, you alone are the King of kings. Your throne alone is occupied by a great and glorious ruler. Your kingdom is coming and it will never end. Lord Jesus, keep us hungry for more, more of your kingdom, more of your glory, more of your presence. Give us a new nature with new desires to where we no longer are satisfied with the pursuits of this world and its kings and its kingdoms. And Lord Jesus, it is my prayer that we would be your kingdom people, that every decision we would make would simply be one of, "Does this honor or dishonor my king? Does this glorify or not glorify my king?" And Lord Jesus, we thank you that despite history being filled with kings and rulers who come and go, it's your throne, above all, coming eventually to rule over all, where there is a King worthy of our worship to be met. Lord Jesus, you are a better King, you provide a better kingdom, and to that we say amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.