God Who Prepares

Esther 2:1-3:15

Key Verse: 2:17 “Now the king was attracted to Esther more than any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

The book of Esther has several similarities and differences from the book of Ruth. Both books talk about women who lived by faith. Both stories finish with a happy ending. Ruth was a gentle widow while Esther was a Jewish orphan. The story of Ruth happened in the fields of Jewish land while the story of Esther occurred in the palace of the foreign country. In both books the name of God is not mentioned even once, still we find the footprints of God in each and every occasion of these two books. So with the attitude of an explorer we can find treasures hidden in the book of Esther.

Last week in chapter 1 we learned how God deposed Queen Vashti. In the luxurious and debaucherous banquet King Xerxes wanted to boast about the beauty of the queen before his people. But Vashti refused the king’s order which caused her to step down from her position. Leaving many suspicions and questions behind this story, we keep searching for the hidden treasure, especially God’s divine sovereignty over the human story.

First, Esther made queen (2:1-18) Verses 1-4 tells us about how the king’s personal attendants, who had advised the king to depose the queen, suggested finding a new queen instead of Vashti. They proposed the king to find a beautiful young virgin from his kingdom to replace Vashti. This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it. (4) In verses 5-7 the name of Mordecai and Esther appear for the first time. Who was Mordecai? He was one of the Jewish remnants who did not return to Jerusalem, but stayed in Susa to serve the gentile king. Even though he served the gentle king Xerxes, he kept his identity as a Jew, a people of God. Above all he was a man of faith who did not bow down to idols. Mordecai had a daughter-like-cousin named Esther. Esther was an orphan who had lost her parents when she was very young. So, Mordecai took her like his own daughter. (7)

When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. In the capital city of the Persian Empire there opened a Miss Universe contest. All the beautiful and young pageants gathered from around the world including Esther. Among them Esther was excellent. She must have been 5 foot 12 inches with blue eyes and blond hair. Her beautiful outward figure reminds us of a song of songs. “*How beautiful you are, my darling! ...your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats...your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn...your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely...your neck is like the tower of David...your breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle...*” (Son 4:1-5) Look at verse 9. “***She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king’s palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.***” Esther won first place in the first round with a unanimous decision. God especially moved the heart of Hegai, who was in charge of the contest, to see Esther with a special favor. The process of making Esther a queen started right away. Immediately all beauty treatments including cosmetics, perfumes, and clothing were provided for Esther along with the seven female attendants. Esther received all kinds of benefits and privileges since she became a queen candidate.

In the middle of the peak day of her life, Esther didn’t forget Mordecai’s words. Verse 10 says that Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. (10) Mordecai prevented any possible obstacle or disadvantage because of her nationality which might block Esther’s way to become a queen. Everyday he walked back and forth the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her. (11) Verses 12-14 explains how the queen candidates prepared before they appeared before the king. It took 12 months for makeup prep, 6 months dedicated to oil of myrrh and another 6 months for perfumes and cosmetics. Since they were sent to the king for one night, they would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. (14) This was the law for the queen candidate.

Now the turn for Esther came. She was an obedient woman. She asked for nothing other than what Hegai had suggested. Finally, Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was chosen as the best beauty for the next queen. She was taken to King Xerxes, who was attracted to Esther more than to any other women. (17) Esther won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So, the king set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. (18) Finally, Esther became the queen of the Persian Empire after Vashti. The king was so joyful that he opened a great banquet, Esther’s banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He also proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. (18)

I was amazed that Esther prepared for 12 months in order to meet the king. Not only she kept her virginity but also kept her beauty to be a queen by all means. We Christians are pure virgins to meet our King Jesus in the kingdom of God. How are we preparing ourselves to meet our King? Esther treated herself with oil of myrrh for six months and with perfumes and cosmetics for six months. She prepared herself best for the king. In Matthew’s gospel Jesus compared us to the ten virgins who were waiting for a bridegroom. (Mt 25:1-13) Nobody knows when the bridegroom Jesus comes again. Are you ready to welcome him? Did you prepare oil for your lamp? Are you washed by the blood of Jesus? Did you prepare a holy jacket for the kingdom of God?

Our God is God who prepares and who helps his people to prepare. He is not the one who works at random or without any preparation. Whatever he does, he has a plan and prepares in advance before he works. God chose Abraham and prepared him to become a father of many nations for 25 years. Abraham wanted a son right after he was called. But he was not ready to receive God’s blessing. So, God prepared him spiritually to receive God’s blessing. God did not use Moses right away after he brought him out of Egypt. God disciplined Moses for 40 years in the desert to become a shepherd for his people. God prepared Moses in the palace for 40 years and in the desert for 40 years before he used Moses. Jesus called his twelve disciples and helped them to be prepared to become shepherds of God’s people. They were just a band of undisciplined rank and files. Jesus disciplined them to become great apostles and leaders of his people. Jesus commanded them to wait for the Holy Spirit. Jesus helped them to prepare their hearts for the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself lived for 30 years as a carpenter for the sake of the 3 years’ life as the Messiah.

Some say that God answers our prayer slowly, or he doesn’t answer at all. But that is not the case. We don’t receive God’s answer because we are not ready to receive God’s blessing. God definitely loves us and answers us, but we are not prepared. God waits until we are prepared and ready. I believe that some of us want to feed sheep and pray hard. I want to ask you to be prepared first spiritually and biblically. I remember what Paul said, “*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season.*” (2 Ti 4:2) We pray for the immediate end of the war between Russia and Ukraine. To our dismay Putin summoned more young Russians to join the army for the battle. But we don’t hear any better news for Russia. This is because most drafted Russian soldiers were sent to the battlefield after short training. They were not ready. They were not prepared for the battle. Our God is God who prepares. He works as he planned in advance. God prepared Esther and Mordecai for the future destiny of Israel. God deposed Vashti and raised Esther to accomplish his will in the future. God always has a plan before he does something.

Second, Mordecai and Haman (19-3:15) Verses 19-23 tells us the story that Mordecai uncovered a conspiracy. During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, two king’s officers who guarded the doorway became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. (22) And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. (23) Why did this story appear in the middle of Esther’s royal story. There is a purpose in mentioning this story. God prepared Mordecai’s credit in advance so that he might gain the king’s favor in chapter 6. In chapter 6:1-11 when the king recognized how Mordecai found the conspiracy and saved his life, he rewarded Mordecai with great honor. God helped Mordecai to gain the king’s favor for the future event.

In chapter 3 there appears conflict between Mordecai and Haman. Haman was greatly honored by the king who gave him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, except Mordecai. Mordecai would not kneel down or pay Haman honor. This was because Mordecai was a Jew who knelt down and worshiped God only. Mordecai also knew that Haman did not deserve to be honored. Mordecai’s refusal to honor him made Haman very angry. Haman looked for a way to kill not only Mordecai, but also all his people, all the Jews who lived in the whole kingdom of Xerxes (6)

Look at verse 7. “***In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.***” Haman cast a lot to find the best day and month to execute all the Jews. The lot fell on the twelfth month. This thing may be ignored but should not because there is God’s divine providence behind this lot. God did not allow the lot to fall on next month or the following month. The lot fell at the end of the year, one year later since then. God set the day and month far away from the day of casting the lot so that Mordecai and his people might prepare for themselves during those days. Proverbs 19:21 says, “*Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.*” Proverbs 16:9 says, “*In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.*” No matter how Haman schemed and plotted to kill Mordecai and his people, it is the LORD who determines each step. No matter how the wicked plans to destroy the righteous, it is the LORD who controls everything. No matter how Satan tries to kill Christians, he will not do anything unless God allows. Haman wanted to kill Mordecai and all the Jews even overnight. But God let the lot fall at the end of the year. We, the people of God, must believe that God prepares and God protects. Therefore, we don’t have to worry about any harm or danger in the time of crisis. We must trust in God and believe in his divine sovereignty and provision behind all occasions of our lives. Amen!

There is a hidden story behind the war between Russia and Ukraine. Putin in Russia planned to invade Ukraine in January while the ground was still frozen so that their tanks could run fast. He expected that the war could be over in a week. But Xi Jinping, president of China, asked Putin to delay his invasion after the Beijing Olympics was over. Xi did not want the Olympics to be ruined because of the war. Putin agreed and waited until the Olympics was over. But when the Olympics was over, the frozen ground melted and the Russian tanks could not move on the muddy roads. Many Russian tanks were destroyed by Ukraine rockets. In this way God frustrated Putin’s ambitious plan through Chinese president Mr. Xi. Psalms 2:1-3 says, “*Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed...The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the LORD scoffs at them*.” In verses 8-15 Haman began to put his plot into action. He gave bribery money to the king who allowed to issue the decree to kill all the Jews around his empire. (13) But he did not know that all things are in God’s control. He did it in vain and dug his own burial site because of this.

In conclusion our God is like a movie director who ends his movies with a happy ending. Our God is also a music conductor who makes noisy music a beautiful harmony. In all things God works for good and beautiful for his people and for his purpose. The story of Esther is going on in this way. Our God plans and prepares. He also provides all things for us to fulfill his plan. I pray that we may meet the God of Esther personally when we finish studying her heroic story. Amen!