

A BRIDE FIT FOR A KING

Today's Text: (1) Esther, Chaps 1-2 (2) Rev. 19: 5-8

Extracts:

- 1. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (...who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia) ... that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants-the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him....*Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus. ...When the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded (his servants) to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come ...Then the king's servants who attended to him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king... Let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti."* This thing pleased the king and he did so [Esth. 1: 1,3, 9,10; 2: 2,4]**
- 2. Then a voice came from the throne saying, ... "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints [Rev. 19: 5a, 7-8]**

There is the story of a television reporter who organized a competition to identify the man who actually controls his wife. All the contestants were required to assemble in a specified venue at a specified date and time. On that day, two lines (A and B) emerged. In Line A, there were so many people that the queue stretched some distance back. It contained men who had to admit that they were actually controlled by their wives! In Line B, there was only one man who said that he controlled his wife. Everybody was curious and wanted to know his formula. The reporter turned to him on live television and asked, "Tell us, how do you control your wife?" The man, looking stupid, replied, "I don't know. She asked me to stay here!"

Is men's dominance of their wives myth or reality? Wives, can you or do you in deed submit to your husbands? Prospective husbands and wives, what are you looking for? Believers who are the brides of Christ by virtue of being members of His church, do you know what He is looking for in His brides when He returns as King? Those are some of the issues we shall attempt to deal with in today's lesson. We shall study how Esther became the bride of King Ahasuerus and assess how helpful the story is to our own circumstances.

1. What kind of bride are you?

All over the world, a good number of marriages are in distress. Husbands and wives are quarrelling or angry with each other over matters that would *ordinarily* not cause any dispute. Some relationships have ended in separation or divorce. Some couples have remained together for social, religious or economic reasons but they share nothing in common. Was that what you bargained for when you went into the relationship? What went wrong along the way? We also know that some couples are in an exciting union that they would not trade for silver or gold.

Immediately, the explanation that the problem hinges on submission traps us. Men reportedly use submission to limit their wives' importance, contribution or even relevance. On the other hand, we hear men complain of their wives' rebellion against their husbands' leadership of the home. They blame women liberation for the modern bride's reluctance/unwillingness to accept the gospel of submission that says, "wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church" [**Eph. 5: 22-23**].

Is submission a *requirement* or a *result*? In other words, if submission is one side of the coin, what is the other side? After all, a one-sided coin is counterfeit! Husbands are expected to "love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself" [**v. 28**]. How many husbands love themselves not to talk of loving their wives? To love yourself is to submit to Christ's control, who is the head of the body, the church [**v. 23**]. A man who has submitted to Christ is likely to earn his wife's respect. *Therefore, submission is for both the husband and his wife.*

In a very inspiring lecture, entitled "Submission and how I conquered it," Diane Hagee, the wife of Pastor John Hagee, said that *every good motive might not necessarily be God's purpose*. For example, in modern societies that are placing emphasis on gender equality, submission connotes oppression and inequality. Good motive suggests that submission is no longer compatible with reality. But is that God's purpose? The word of God says, "Wives, *likewise*, be submissive to your own husbands, *that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear*" [**1 Pet. 3: 1-2**]. Therefore, from God's point of view, a wife may choose to be guided by the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil or the Tree of life [**Gen. 2: 9**].

a) *A bride according to the Tree of knowledge*

This bride looks at marriage from the worldview. Issues are examined from the point of view of logic, rights, benefits and pleasure. Marriage is "for better to stay or for worse to go!" There is a high degree of

selfishness and insensitivity to her husband's needs or interests. At the slightest disagreement, separation or divorce is a solution. Some brides even sign pre-nuptial contracts with their husbands on assets sharing in the event of divorce! In that kind of marriage, the question of submission does not arise. There is even no relationship!

b) *A bride under the Tree of life*

The bride takes a spiritual view of her marriage. She looks at the cross of Christ and realizes that Jesus had no reason to die on that cross for He was without sin. During His trial, He did not defend Himself. He willingly went to the cross *because He had submitted to His Father's will* [Matt. 26: 39]. By His stripes, this bride believes that all the insults or disrespect, which a wayward husband may pour on her, have been healed. She also learns that, for humbling Himself and submitting to His Father's will even to the point of death, God also has highly exalted Jesus "and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" [Phil. 2: 8-11].

The bride under the Tree of life sees her submission to her husband as part of God's purpose for His church. Once God's purpose is obeyed, the reward is also enormous. If she submits and her husband does not reciprocate with love, honour and understanding, then his own prayers will be hindered [1 Pet. 3: 7]! Who wants to pray in vain?

From the forgoing, it is clear that the bride fit for the king is the one who submits to the Tree of life, not to the Tree of knowledge. Let us use this conclusion to examine the story of Vashti and Esther.

2. Esther is the king's new bride!

a) *The opportunity is created*

Ahasuerus was a powerful Persian king whose territory stretched from Ethiopia in Africa to India in Asia. There were 137 provinces in his vast kingdom [Esth. 1: 1]. His queen was called Vashti who was very beautiful [vv. 9, 11]. One day, the king gave a big party to which he had invited "the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of the provinces" [v. 3]. His wife also organized one for the women "in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus" [v. 9].

Perhaps out of self-aggrandisement, apart from the fact that he was already drunk, the king wanted to show off his beautiful wife to his guests [vv. 9-

10] So, he sent his servants to call the queen. The servants returned with the embarrassing message that she had refused to come [**v. 12**].

From the woman's point of view, it is possible that she had become fed up with her husband always parading her among visitors as if she were a trophy. Moreover, at the time of the invitation, she was herself entertaining women in her own quarters built for her by the king. She needed to impress upon her guests (who were presumably the wives of the officials that her husband was entertaining) that she was the queen, not a maid! From her husband's perspective, this was a major insult and a big blow to his ego. Memucan, the head of his servants summarized the impact of the queen's action as follows [**vv. 16-17**]:

Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people, who are in all the provinces...for the queen's behaviour will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes.

Can you see both husband and wife taking shelter under the Tree of knowledge? Without giving his wife the benefit of the doubt (after all, the servants could be lying or the queen might have had cogent reasons for not coming), the king pronounced her action "excessive contempt and wrath" [**v. 18**]. He divorced his wife and decided to "give her royal position to another who is better than she" [**v. 19**].

b) *The grooming*

The king's decree went out that the servants should look for "beautiful young virgins" and the young woman who pleased the king would be made queen in place of Vashti [**Esth. 2: 2-4**]. Now in the capital city of Shushan, there lived a Jewish exile by the name of Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin. His uncle had a daughter called Hadassah (Esther) whom he had raised as his daughter after her parents had died. She was a very lovely and beautiful young woman [**vv. 5-7**]. When the king's order came to Mordecai's attention, he allowed Esther to participate in the "beauty" contest.

In the palace, Esther was placed in the care of Hegal the custodian of the women. She found favour with him and "he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance." In addition, he provided her with seven choice maidservants from the king's palace and moved them and Esther "to the best place in the house of the women." *Everyday*, Mordecai "paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her" [**vv. 8-11**].

The word of God says, “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction” [**Prov. 13:1**] and “when a man’s ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him” [**Prov. 16: 7**]. Esther was a wise girl and she obeyed her “father” Mordecai. Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. Therefore, it is not surprising that she found favour with the palace officials. That she was instructed by Mordecai not to disclose her Jewish identity suggests that she would have been disqualified outright.

c) *Her selection*

The time came for the young women to be presented to the king by turns. When it was Esther’s turn to go in to see the king, “she requested *nothing but what Hegal... the custodian of the women advised. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all who saw her*” [**Esth. 2: 15**]. What a wise girl that Esther really was! Who else knew the king’s taste better than Hegal who might also have had a hand in selecting past queens? *She submitted to her “father” and now to her beautician.*

As soon as Esther stepped into the king’s presence, he “loved Esther *more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins.*” So, he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti [**v. 17**]. In deed, “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; like the rivers of water, He turns it *wherever He wishes*” [**Prov. 21: 1**]. Ahasuerus had no say in Esther’s choice. God did it for him!

3. Lessons

On the surface, we learn from this story the outcome of two models of relationships in a marriage. In the marriage between Ahasuerus and Vashti, we see the danger of basing a relationship on the carnal mind, which is “enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, *nor indeed can be*” [**Rom. 8: 7**]. Relationships that are anchored on the carnal mind can be found sheltering under the Tree of knowledge. On the other hand, the new bride, Esther, had been prepared and selected by God for His purpose. Even before knowing her more closely, the king had already fallen in love with her. All the way, she demonstrated the spirit of humility and submission. To be spiritually minded “is life and peace” [**v. 6**]. Esther was sheltered under the Tree of life.

At the spiritual level, Esther is a figure of the church, the bride of Christ,” arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” [**Rev. 19: 8**]. Wives are to submit to their husbands, “*as to the Lord, for the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church, and He is the Saviour of the body*” [**Eph. 5: 22-23**].

The church contains believing Jews and Gentiles. In God's salvation plan, the Jews, being the seed of Abraham represent the natural branches. Because of unbelief (which is an attribute of the Tree of knowledge), the unbelieving branches have been cut off while the believing Gentiles, the seed of Abraham by faith, have been grafted in [Rom. 11: 1-6]. So, believers have become "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" and God's "own special people" [1 Pet. 2: 9]. They are anchored on the Tree of life. In like manner, Ahasuerus divorced Vashti who rejected his invitation. In her place, he grafted in an exile and foreigner, Esther, who was not bold enough to disclose her ethnic identity. Esther received the honour because she was anchored to God.

4. Conclusion

The lesson of that story is that men's dominance of their wives is more myth than reality. In Diane Hagee's lecture referred to earlier, she asked two interesting questions: "Where was Adam when Satan was talking to Eve? Why did Abraham obey Sarah and marry Hagar?" In both cases, the men did not control their wives, even when the wives were completely submitted to their husbands! Therefore, when a wife actually submits to her husband, she has obeyed God's commandment. Therefore, she is entitled to the blessings that go with obedience, some of which are:

- God grants her wisdom to build her home [Prov. 14: 1]
- The heart of her husband safely trusts her [Prov. 31:11]
- She is economically empowered to profit herself and her family and to be charitable to other people [vv. 13-20]
- She enjoys God's protection and security [v. 21]
- Her husband is respected among his peers and elders [v. 23]
- Her children call her blessed and her husband praises her [v. 28]

There are bad husbands. However, if God could touch the heart of Ahasuerus on account of Esther, He can also turn your husband around. Go to God, not marriage counsellors who are firmly planted under the Tree of knowledge.

Be a bride fit for the king!