

**Text: Esther 1:1-22**

**Title: “A Woman’s Place”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Happy Mother’s Day. I’m starting a new series from one of the two books in the Bible named after a woman ... the book of Esther. You’ll find it if you go to Psalms, take a left and go two books to Esther. As you’re turning I want to give thanks to God for the fresh start we launched last Sunday. The spirit was incredible. I could tell your hearts were truly set on giving God greater glory. What would happen if we put that much prayer and intensity into every Lord’s Day? Okay, have you found Esther?

Let’s just take one quick flyover of the book, then we’ll come back and land in the first chapter. Let me give you a quick summary of the book of Esther by introducing you to the main cast of characters. The story revolves around...

## **FIVE FAMOUS PEOPLE ... CAST OF CHARACTERS**

The very first verse of the book introduces us to...

### **KING XERXES (AHASUERUS)**

**Esther 1:1 - This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:**

King Xerxes is an impressive, powerful, egotistical ruler over the most powerful nation of the world ... the mighty Persian Empire which stretches from India in the east to North Africa (Cush) in the west.

The typical response to the name King Xerxes would be *Ooooooo!* Everybody say *Ooooooo!* That’s what people thought when they thought of Xerxes. King Xerxes can also be King Jerkses. He has a harem of several hundred women, and he also has a wife. She’s the next character...

### **QUEEN VASHTI**

And when we think of Queen Vashti we might say, *Oh No!* Everybody say *Oh No!* Why? Something bad happens to her, which we’ll see in just a moment. In fact she is removed from her position as queen. And the next queen is the adopted daughter of the next character who happens to be a Jewish man living in Persia...

### **UNCLE MORDECAI**

The typical response to Uncle Mordecai would be *Awesome!* Everybody say *Awesome!* Uncle Mordecai is an awesome dude, for the most part. Now, why is Mordecai, a Jew, living in the pagan land of Persia? Really the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther go together. Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians and the Jews were taken into captivity there. The Babylonians were

conquered by the Persians, led by King Cyrus, Xerxes' great grandfather. Cyrus gave the order that the Jews could return to their homeland, and many of them did ... but not Mordecai's family. For some reason they stay in Persia.

So Mordecai plays an important role in the drama of the book of Esther because, among other things, he has adopted his young, orphaned cousin, a girl named...

## **ESTHER**

The typical response to the Queen Esther is *Yay!* Everybody say *Yay!* She's the leading lady of this drama. We'll learn in a moment how it comes to pass that she becomes the queen, and in that position becomes pivotal in God's plan to protect His people. It's an amazing story.

But there's one more character in the drama you need to meet:

## **HAMAN THE AGAGITE**

The typical response to Haman the Agagite is *Hiss Boo!* Everybody say *Hiss Boo!* He's the dark, evil character in the story ... Haman the Agagite just sounds dark and evil. Haman becomes a very powerful man in Persia, second in importance only to King Xerxes. In that position Haman devises a plot to kill all the Jews who live in Persia, of course that means Uncle Mordecia and Queen Esther.

**So those are the FIVE FAMOUS PEOPLE. But you also need to know about A SPECIAL HOLIDAY.**

When Haman devised the plan to exterminate the Jews in Persia he set the date by something called "casting the lot." The Hebrew word for "lot" is *pur*. Everybody say *pur*. Casting the lot is like rolling the dice. It was probably a kind of divination where Haman and his counselors were depending on the roll of the dice to tell them what the gods willed.

Well we'll see that something goes wrong with Haman's plan and, in fact, the Jews are miraculously spared. And to commemorate God's deliverance of the Jews they established a special holiday. It was named *Purim*. Everybody say *Purim*. Sounds like a flavor of baby food doesn't it? *Purim* is the name of a Jewish holiday that is still celebrated to this day. *Purim* is named for the *pur* which was cast to determine the will of the gods as to when the Jews would be killed.

Ironically, it's not the gods who determine the fate of the Jews in Esther. It is the powerful providence of Almighty God who worked through people and through circumstances to protect His covenant people, the Jews, from being completely exterminated.

Listen, God is in control from the very beginning, even though His name is never mentioned in the book of Esther. That's right! Imagine that. A book of the Bible than never mentions the name of God. Moses, the Law, sin or righteousness are never mentioned. So when we read the book we might wonder why to book is in the Bible. Well it's that very point ... that sometimes God seems to absent when we need Him to be near ... sometimes he seems to be silent when we need Him to speak

to us. But what we see is that God is actually intricately and intimately involved in every situation of our lives.

I've entitled this series "Risk ... Principles for Following God's Will for Your Life." And it all starts with the knowledge that God is always working in behalf of His people ... He is in control of all the circumstances. And because we can trust Him to provide for and protect us, we can risk everything to be obedient to Him. Life is not a series of random events that are determined by chance (A ROLL OF THE DICE). We can take big risks to do great things because we know that God is supporting us. That's what I want to challenge you to do in this series ... to find your place in the will of God and boldly throw yourself into that with complete abandon, holding nothing back.

Okay, so there you have the FIVE FAMOUS PEOPLE AND A SPECIAL HOLIDAY. Now let's go back to the beginning of the book and jump into the story in the few minutes that we have remaining. And the story is very appropriate for us to look at on this Mother's Day.

We've already seen that the king of Persia is a powerful, egotistical man whose Greek name is Xerxes.

**Esther 1:3 - and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.**

This is the most elaborate, extravagant banquet you can imagine. Xerxes is richest man in the world ... the most powerful man in the world ... and the most worshipped man in the world. He's a combination of Donald Trump, President Obama and the Pope all wrapped up in one person. So you can imagine what a party he could throw. He puts everything he has on display. And the party lasted six months and it was for men only. He had an open bar and people could drink with no limitations.

Meanwhile, Queen Vashti was having her own banquet for the wives, but King Xerxes wants to show off his beautiful wife.

**Esther 1:10 - On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him...**

**Esther 1:11 - to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.**

This is not a good thing. This is probably a debased, immoral thing that Xerxes wants his queen to do. He wants to show off his trophy wife in more ways than one. The queen knows this is a room full of men who have been drinking for six months ... she knows where this will likely go and she says, "No way."

The queen's refusal sets off a national crisis; what if all the wives refused to do what their husbands told them to do? So Xerxes calls together his trusted advisers, And they propose a solution.

**Esther 1:19 - “Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.**

Xerxes thinks this is a great idea. So the edict is sent throughout the kingdom that every man should rule over his own household. And in doing that Xerxes was putting the women in their place.

It’s not a far stretch for us to imagine a woman being treated in this way. So what is a woman’s place ... in the home, in the church, in world? If you ask different people, particularly men, you will get different answers. We know how people like Xerxes would answer that question, but how does the love of Christ demonstrated in the Cross of Christ and in the teachings of Christ answer that question?

### **1. A WOMAN IS TO BE APPRECIATED NOT USED.**

I’ve heard men say the most demeaning thing about a woman: “A woman’s place is in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant.” But listen ... her place is not to be viewed through lustful eyes, but through appreciative eyes that see her beauty and worth in the eyes of God.

**Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**

**Ephesians 5:33 - However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

Sure, the Bible teaches us that men and women have differing roles in the home, in the church and in society. And those roles are to be honored and appreciated, not demeaned.

### **2. A WOMAN IS TO BE PROTECTED NOT ABUSED.**

What Xerxes did to Vashti was common in ancient times, but we cannot accept that. A woman’s place is not on the arm of a man to be worn for the man’s esteem, like a trophy wife. Her place is to be in the arms of a man who will protect her.

Others will say, by their attitude and actions, though perhaps not with their lips, that a woman’s place is unclothed on the screen of a computer. Guys, the next time you’re tempted to look at a woman in that way remember she is person whom God created and for whom Jesus died. Listen to the spirit of Christ and His cross in...

**Ephesians 5:28 - In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.**

**Ephesians 5:29 - After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—**

Next...

### **3. A WOMAN IS TO BE RESPECTED, NOT CONTROLLED.**

King Xerxes and his counselors were concerned only about keeping women “in their place.” I hear men talking about their wives as “my woman,” like she’s his servant ... like her only purpose in life is to wait on her husband hand and foot.

Certainly men are to be leaders in their homes, but that doesn’t mean a controlling attitude. Her place is not the role of a servant controlled by a man, but a fellow-servant along with her husband who are both controlled by God.

**1 Peter 3:7 - Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

### **CONCLUSION**

Who controls your thinking? The spirit of King Xerxes or the spirit of King Jesus.

- Xerxes sat on a throne in Persia; but Jesus sits on the throne of heaven ruling the entire universe.
- Xerxes used his power to abuse women; Jesus used His power to elevate women.
- Xerxes spent his days being served; Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life away.
- Xerxes killed his enemies; Jesus died for His enemies.
- Xerxes died and today no one worships him; Jesus also died, but hundreds of millions worship Him as King Jesus.
- Xerxes kingdom came to an end; but Jesus’ kingdom will last forever and forever.

And, church, we are citizens of that greater kingdom. Who will we follow? Whose love will we spread?