

Proverbs 31 And The Wife Of Christ (Part Three): Esther

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As noted when I began this series of sermons on Proverbs 31 and the wife of Christ, just as the first woman, Eve, was created from the first man, Adam, and thus shared completely in his life, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, the second woman, the wife of Christ, shares completely in the life of Christ as an intrinsic part of God's work. Also in that last sermon, we spent a good bit of time reinforcing the fact that right from the beginning God created a type of the wife of Christ and marriage as the last thing that He did before He created the Sabbath.

The very last thing He did on the sixth day of creation before He created the Sabbath for man's benefit, as Jesus Christ told us in Mark 2:27, was create woman out of the man, and marriage, with the complementary parts in perfect unity. Again, a type of the sacrifice of Christ, creating His wife to be just like Him. This is all done by God and His strength to accomplish His purpose.

The wife of Christ very certainly has responsibilities that she must do in preparation for this very privileged responsibility. But as we noted within the source of the Hebrew word for virtue, *chayil*, that appears in Proverbs 31:10, the virtuous wife, the *chayil* wife, this word also very clearly indicates strength and power that only comes from God Himself.

Also in that first sermon, we noted God has given us a unique opportunity and all the things we need to individually prepare to complement Jesus Christ as His wife. I believe God has given us a plumb line for our own very particular preparation within the description of the perfected wife of Christ as set before us in Proverbs 31:10-31. It is therefore the privileged responsibility of those called into this most intimate relationship with Christ now to spend a lifetime learning to live as Christ lives.

As I said in that first sermon, the wife of Christ absolutely must be doing the things that complement God's plan to create man in His image and likeness. I tried to stress there that there are two words in the English that are spelled exactly the same: complement with an e and compliment with an i. But both express the vital and essential parts of the character and the work of the wife of Christ. Complement with an e is something that completes or brings to perfection. Compliment with an i is an expression of praise or admiration. Both express the work that we are to be doing now in this lifetime of preparation for the return of Jesus Christ and the responsibilities that go with our privileged opportunity to be the very wife of Christ. This is an incredible privilege which has been given right now if we follow through with what God then clearly expects from each and every one of us individually.

This is vital for us to keep in mind, especially as we are going to see today, the most important part of this training process will take place under the most adverse circumstances, some of which Richard talked about leading up to the sermon. But through this we become vessels of honor, sanctified and useful to our Master, prepared for every good work, as it says there in II Timothy 2:21.

But just to remind us of the primary aspect of virtue that can only be developed through God's care, please turn with me again to II Samuel 22. I know we were there just last week, and then before that, but this is a crucial lesson for us to learn that I hope will help us take away from this sermon today. We will also again review two sets of scriptures that not only show God's strength *chayil* as the source of our *chayil*, but it is also the most significant point for us to keep in mind during the virtuous wife's preparation process in this world, a point that I really want to focus on today.

II Samuel 22:1-3 Then David spoke to the Lord the words of this song, on the day when the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. And he said, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence.

II Samuel 22:31-34 "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of God is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer. He sets me on my high places."

At this point I want to make a correction for something that I said in the last two sermons. In II Samuel 22:33, I identified the word strength as the same word *chayil*. But I had made a mistake that I need to correct right now. The word *chayil* does appear in this verse but it is with not the word strength, it is translated in the word power. This does not change what I had said before about God being the source of everything good and the power that only comes from God. The word strength is from the Hebrew word *maoz*, meaning a refuge, a fortress, a shelter. It is used figuratively of God as a fortress.

I mention this because we need to be as precise as possible when speaking the Word of God. But also I thought there was something else here which will fit very well later on into this sermon. This is why we began in II Samuel, chapter 22, verse 1. In verse 3, the word strength as translated in the New King James is not in the King James Version or in the Authorized Version, but the translators added it because it carries with it the sense of the rest of the verse. Within the violence around him, David knew only God was his place of refuge and his strength.

As I said, this is going to be an important later in the sermon when we examine a type of the wife of Christ who finds herself hidden in plain sight to serve His purpose with *chayil*.

Now again, considering the violent chaos of this world but all under the sovereign power of God, please turn with me once again back to Habakkuk. We will be picking it up in chapter 1, verse 1, where it says,

Habakkuk 1:1-4 The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You shall not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see so much trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention rises.

Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

You know, this is really interesting because as Richard just said in President Trump's decisions of unilaterally going into different places, what is the law of this country and how much is it being violated because it looks like it might be a good thing? This is what Habakkuk saw.

And then down in chapter , verse 17. We see Habakkuk's reasoned response through all of this.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on high hills.

Again, it is vital that we recognize this is what God has very purposefully done for our good to develop the wife of Christ within the pain and the chaos of a world gone crazy. There are other circumstances under which the virtuous wife of Christ develops into perfect complement to Christ to be just like Him. But as Habakkuk said, "The Lord is my strength." Or power as it is translated in II Samuel 22:33. He is my *chayil*. "He will make my feet like deer's feet," Habakkuk writes, "and He will make me walk on my high hills."

As noted in the sermon last week, the only way for each of us individually to wholeheartedly arrive at this same conclusion lies in the oft-quoted and ultimate theme of the book of Habakkuk. It was stated in chapter 2, verse 4.

Habakkuk 2:4 Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

We are going to try to expand on this picture in a few minutes as pictured in the book of Esther and another type of the virtuous wife within the chaos and violence of evil that we must deal with in this world, our pain and suffering

that goes with it. But first, please turn with me back again to Proverbs 31, just looking at the last two verses.

Proverbs 31:29-31 "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord [like Cynthia Collins], she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Please note that the ultimate descriptor of the virtuous wife is as the one who fears the Lord. Now please turn with me to the beginning of Proverbs, chapter 1, verse 7.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The book of Proverbs, the how-to book that God has given us for living His wisdom and avoiding the evil of this world, begins and ends with the key to everything: deep abiding respect for God that shows up at the end in the perfected and virtuous wife of Christ. We need to stop for a bit to consider this key to everything in the fear of God, the very thing that keeps us before our God in a way that pleases Him.

Hold your finger there in Proverbs 1, because we are going to be coming back here in a bit. But please turn with me again to another vital memory scripture that we should look at and always keep in front of us as the perfected virtuous wife of Christ.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all these things My hand is made, and all those things exist," says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: on Him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

I do not think that the proper fear of the Lord has been more clearly explained than John Ritenbaugh did in the Philippians 2 Bible study that was

on the church website a few Fridays ago. I think it is well worth our time now to consider this rather lengthy section that I have cited from that Bible study. What John had to say, I think, is the very essential truth regarding fearing our great and awesome sovereign God who has called us to a very special privileged responsibility as we work our way through this preparation time with proper fear and trembling. This fear will be perfected in the life of Christ.

John said specifically regarding this verse, Proverbs 1:7, in his Bible study, referring to Paul's admonishment in Philippians 2:12, where he said that they should do all their work "with fear and trembling," John writes about Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

John said,

In another place it says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." What he is saying here is that fear is a foundation. It is a foundation for wisdom. It is a foundation for knowledge. Now having faith in God is wise, the wise thing to do, but having fear is not something that scares evil out of men and good into him. You cannot make an evil man good because you are scared of him. You may make him more cautious, but you do not make him good because he fears.

John continued,

Now I have often wondered about this because we are told that this fear is a healthy and abiding respect for God. Now that is correct. It is. Every time I study the word, I cannot help but find that there are elements within it that it also means to be scared. In other words, there is more than just a respect. Now you will notice the apostle Paul said in fear and trembling, where he said in Philippians, Work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Trembling is something that you do when you are afraid.

And I think that the apostle Paul, in showing us that there is an element of fright that is involved with this word fear, does it seem

logical to you that a loving, compassionate, and merciful God would want us to be afraid of Him? On the one hand, I would have to say yes, because when men encountered the God in the Old Testament, they shook in their boots. Isaiah said, "Woe is me, I am undone!" When he saw God, he was about to come to pieces. So there is an element that is there of fear.

But on the other hand, if we were afraid of Him, we would be very careful about coming into His presence, and we would be looking over our shoulders all the time, wondering when the next lightning bolt was about to hit us that had our name on it and we would turn into a blackened, smoldering pile of flesh. So I arrived at a conclusion, at least for right now (it is always subject to correction), I frankly think it is the right one, and that is, I just tied it into that illustration that I gave you about the family and the young man where his fear of soiling the reputation of the family name held him in line. And I think that what God is talking about here is not so much being afraid of Him as it is of being afraid that we will be unfaithful in carrying out our responsibility.

To me, that it is different. We love Him so much we do not want to do anything that will cast aspersions on His reputation. And so what we are afraid of is that we will not live up to what might be expected of us, brethren.

This fits very well into our responsibilities and our preparation as the wife of Christ.

John continues,

That is where the fear is. We love Him. We are not afraid of Him, but we admire Him so much. He is so attractive to us. His holiness is so great, we want to make sure it is not tarnished in any way. That is what I think it is. The fear of being unfaithful to Him and somehow making Him feel badly about us.

Now this fear, I think, and I can illustrate. I am going to even go through John's illustration here because I think it is really a good one that it gives us,

especially all of you fellows that are speakers, with Cody sitting here right in front of me after his fine sermonette a few weeks ago.

He gives an analogy here. He said,

It comes on every one of us whenever we feel that we have a responsibility facing us that is going to stretch us to the limit of our abilities [like giving a sermon with only a couple of days' preparation]. You men who are in Spokesman's Club [this was back in the 1980s when he was still in Worldwide, or in Speech Club here in the Church of the Great God], almost every time you get up to speak you face this fear because you are afraid that in the responsibility of giving a speech you are exposing yourself to ridicule. You are going to show people what your mind is like, and in this case you do not want to tarnish the reputation of your name, of your personality, of your character, of your brains or whatever, and you know you are going to be stretched to the limit of your ability, and you are afraid to get up there and speak.

What I am talking about is a godly application of that same principle where in this case the fear is not projected so much toward ourselves as it is that somehow or another we are not going to live up to what God expects of us and that we are going to be unfaithful in carrying out that responsibility. I will tell you, this is a powerful motivator to make us do well.

When you men know that you have a speech, when you fellows who are giving sermonettes or sermons, I might add, know you have a sermonette or sermon, I will tell you, you study like you have never studied before because you want to be faithful to the responsibility that you have been given, and you want to uphold the reputation of your name.

I am going to add something right here because all the men that speak in the Church of the Great God have this very same feeling. Certainly we do not want to get up and make fools of ourselves, whatever, but John instilled it in all of us that when we come up to speak, we represent the Almighty God, and we certainly do not want to tarnish His name and His reputation.

John continues,

That is what we are talking about here. In some cases, I have known men who actually did tremble when they got up there. I know one man who eventually became an evangelist, when he gave his first sermonette, he got up on the stage and promptly fainted. He overcame that.

What do we need to fight this fear of not upholding the reputation of God's name, this fear of not of being unfaithful to Him? Well, the answer is very easy to say. It is very difficult to do. It is the most difficult thing any human being will ever be called to do. We have to renounce ourselves. That is what we are called upon to do whenever we repent. The thing that keeps the Spirit of God from flowing through us and empowering us to glorify Him and empowering us to overcome and grow is that our self keeps getting in the way. We keep wanting to hang on to it, the grasp of humanity, and we will not humbly submit to the will of God. Our self keeps rearing the ugly head and intervening itself and quenching the Spirit of God, and keeping the gifts of that spirit, the grace of God, from carrying out the will of God in our life. And we will provide ourselves with all kinds of justifications.

John finishes,

But really what it is, it is self-will, self-centeredness exalting itself against the Spirit of God.

Brethren, this is what we are dealing with throughout our whole lives as we are under this preparation process.

I am going to probably make Cody embarrassed here, but I was just looking out and I saw him sitting there, and I was thinking to myself of his father's funeral five years ago. Mike always was a character. He was a funny man. He was an intelligent man, he was glib. He had everything going for him. But I remember sitting at his funeral service, and all of the men that had known him from the time they were in college got up there and to a man they

said, "Yep, Mike is still the same funny, great Mike, but he's no longer that guy who was looking to himself all the time." He had grown; so that by the time they had known him for all those years from college, they saw a man that did exactly what John was talking about here. He kept working on focusing himself away from self-will, self-centeredness, exalting itself against the Spirit of God. I apologize to Cody for putting him on the spot, but I just stood here and as I saw him sitting there, I just was reminded of that measure of a man.

Brethren, I have cited this whole section, including John's analogy, because this is an excellent look at what God is teaching within our preparations as the wife of Christ that is complete as stated at the end of Proverbs with the virtuous wife who has completely made herself ready within the God-given strength and perfect fear of God. At the end of this process, if we use Proverbs 31 as our plumb line of preparation, we will have developed such a love for Jesus Christ that we will want to do everything we have been given to do from our heart with outgoing concern focused on Him.

The wife of Christ will perfectly complement Him so that He can trust His wife from His heart to do everything it takes to rule with Him in perfect unity and holiness of outgoing concern through the Millennium. As I hope I made clear last week, I firmly believe that God is using another Jewish tradition that is kept in almost every Jewish community in the *Eshet Chayil*.

Last week we began the sermon with a special music lead in. A beautiful piece of the Sabbath Prayer from *Fiddler on the Roof*. Both Richard and myself really tried to make it clear that this special music and sermon were preplanned. It was important to me that we did this because week after week those of us that speak see God very carefully weave together messages that He wants delivered, even though most often each speaker does not know what the other one is going to say, nor do we typically know the songs of the special music.

So as far as I was concerned, it was important for me to let you know that I had planned that special music last week as a tie-in after I asked Richard if it would be okay to do it. However, that being said, as I thought about this sermon in retrospect and the weeks of preparation between Part One and Part Two of this series, I realized God still was putting together what He wanted.

If that Sabbath song from *Fiddler on the Roof* had not been bouncing around in my mind in between those two parts, I never would have done the research that led me to discover that the very real Jewish tradition of unknown origins that was the source of the melody composed specifically for the musical was the *Eshet Chayil*. As noted the *Eshet Chayil*, woman of valor, which was the inspiration for the melodic *Fiddler on the Roof* Sabbath Prayer is the acrostic verses that end the book of Proverbs. In almost every Jewish community, just as the weekly Sabbath begins, as they stand around the dinner table on Friday evening, they sing Proverbs 31:10-31.

As I noted last week when I read Romans 3:1-4 from the Amplified Bible and specifically the expanse of verse 2 as it relates to God's faithfulness to use them as it said in the Amplified, to the Jews were entrusted the oracles, the brief communications, the intentions, the utterances of God. In spite of their faithlessness and often misconstrued understanding of Scripture because they had failed to tremble at His Word, He still used them.

And as I said, with the faithfulness to His own intentions, He is pointing us to the perfected wife of Christ as pictured in type in Proverbs 31, the virtuous wife and her intrinsically essential tie-in to the Sabbath, a type of the Millennium and the rule of the King of kings.

Now although we established last week that Proverbs 31:10-31 is significantly tied to the beginning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition and that the Sabbath song from *Fiddler on the Roof* was most probably an abstract of this actual tradition, I am going to once again cite the words of that melodic composition.

As I said last week, the lyricist composed this as an abstract of Proverbs 31 with their particular idea of who the woman of valor was. So again, with the Jewish tradition of Proverbs 31 limited to women, Tevye and his wife began the Sabbath singing these words basically to their daughters.

May the Lord protect and defend you. May He always shield you from shame. May you come to be in Israel a shining name.

May you be like Ruth and like Esther. May you be deserving of praise. Strengthen them, O Lord, and keep them from the strangers' ways.

May God bless you and grant you long lives. May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you. May God make you good mothers and wives. May He send you husbands who will care for you.

May the Lord protect and defend you. May the Lord preserve you from pain. Favor them, O Lord, with happiness and peace.

Oh, hear our Sabbath prayer. Amen.

I read those lyrics because it clearly mentions the two women of valor that the Jews tie into Proverbs 31, and I think we can learn some very valuable principles from both when we tie them into the preparation time God has given us, the ones that He has called to fulfill the responsibility of the wife of Christ at His return.

There are a number of women of valor to be noted throughout the Bible. But there are only two books that are named after women: the book of Ruth and the book of Esther. Both can be and are tied into the Proverbs 31 virtuous woman, but each under very different circumstances that point to vital lessons that we can note in our individual preparation process that we can apply from both of them in different ways.

We will be drawing principles as they tie into Proverbs 31, perfected wife of Christ, that may help us in our weekly self-examination of our own preparation process. We are not going to dig deeply into the details of each book. We have a number of sermons and articles on each of those that you can study in greater detail that will help you consider the principles in more detail. But hopefully this will help us start using the Proverbs 31 standard that God has possibly given us as a weekly measuring stick of our individual progress of preparation for this very unique place in God's plan.

To begin with, in Ruth and Esther we see the wife of valor under very different circumstances. The principles we will pick up in Ruth are within

the circumstances of living within the chosen physical people of God, while the vital principles of preparation we are going to pick up from Esther are within the circumstances of living and growing in the chaotic world, the evil and the violent world described by Habakkuk, the world that Richard talked about in the commentary that we are living in, where there is plenty of deaths, of sickness, death, and political malfeasance.

While Ruth can be more easily seen and linked to the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 in all she does and ultimately as the wife of Boaz, a type of Christ, it is a bit harder to do the same with Esther within her circumstances in a marriage to a man who is nothing like Jesus Christ. Yet perhaps the single most important lesson for us to hold on to in our own preparation process is in the book of Esther.

As most of you very probably know, one of the things that makes this particular canonized section of the Bible different is that God is never mentioned within it. Yet when we look at it, He is the focus of it from the beginning to the end within His sovereign authority over everything that is only recognized by those who can tremble at His Word and wait on Him in faith to act as all of us are going through in these times of trial and suffering.

We are not going to have time today to get into the important principles we can take away from the book of Ruth and its tie into the Proverbs 31 virtuous woman in our preparation process to be the perfect complement of Jesus Christ because there is really some really important connections there that we need to get in at a later time.

We are going to spend the rest of the sermon considering the walk of faith it takes in this world at enmity against God to produce the wife of Christ who has the right fear of God, as John so perfectly described in that part of the Philippians Bible study I cited earlier in this sermon.

You know, I was talking to Nancy before services and something came up. I was reading through the Bible this morning and I want to just add something that God tells us about proper fear of Him. Turn with me back to Deuteronomy 5. This was not in my sermon, so I am trying to pick it out.

This is right here at Mount Sinai after the giving of the commandments. And Moses explaining to those getting ready to go into the land what had happened at that point. And he said,

Deuteronomy 5:23-29 "So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. And you said, 'Surely the Lord our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire. We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet He still lives. Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore, then we shall die, and we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived' You go near and hear all that the Lord our God may say, and tell us all that the Lord our God says to you, and we will hear and do it.' Then the Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They are right in all that they have spoken. Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!'

Brethren, this was God Himself saying what He thought about properly fearing Him, obeying His law, learning to live as He lives so that it can be well with us. So we are going to consider this very thing that ties Esther and what she did in faith to the perfect wife of Christ.

So please turn with me to the book of Esther, the first chapter. We are going to be picking up in verses 1 through 5.

Esther 1:1-5 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was Ahasuerus, who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 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—when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the common people. Who were present in Shushan the citadel, from the great to the small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

Right from the beginning of this book we see that this is dealing with circumstances of those of God's chosen people who are living within a world and under the Persian government and the largest of a fickle king.

Esther 1:9-12 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to the King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 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 at the king's command brought by his eunuchs. Therefore, the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

Here we are introduced to Queen Vashti, and the commentaries that I have read were divided on what they think of her and what she did. As a matter of fact, Herbert Lockyer's *All the Men and Women of the Bible*, he writes,

While the book of Esther holds a high place in the sacred literature of the Jews, it has no mention of God or the Holy Land and contains no definite religious teaching. The book contains a genuine strain of human interest, but it is also heavy with the air of divine providence. Although the story of Vashti only covers a few paragraphs in the book, yet in the settling of oriental grandeur we have the elements of imperishable drama. While the bulk of the book revolves around Esther, from our point of view [this is Lockyer's point of view] the shining character in the story is the

queenly Vashti, who was driven out because she refused to display her lovely face and figure before the lustful eyes of the drunken court.

By birth Vashti was the Persian princess possessing, along with her regal bearing, an extraordinary fragile beauty. Her husband was a king who reigned from India and Ethiopia over 127 provinces. Her self-respect and high character meant more to her than her husband's vast realm. Rather than cater to the vanity and sensuality of drunkards, she courageously sacrificed a kingdom. Rather than lower the white banner of woman modesty, Vashti accepted disgrace and dismissal. The only true ruler in that drunken court was the woman who refused to exhibit herself even at the king's command.

You know, I typically find Lockyer has quite a bit of insight into the Bible, but here I think he really missed the boat. It is almost like he was infatuated with Queen Vashti, so much so that he missed the point of how important the lessons that we can learn from this book in principle that are directly tied through Esther into their very important last statement regarding the Proverbs 31, perfected virtuous wife of Christ, who has made herself ready as stated in Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised."

It seems that Queen Vashti charmed Herbert Lockyer right out of his socks. Hopefully we are going to see in a moment that Esther far outshines Queen Vashti in her faithful and very purposeful fear of God. However, we see in the rest of chapter 1 the petulant fury of King Ahasuerus' capricious decision to remove Queen Vashti that he finally regretted when his wrath subsided.

Brethren, all around, whether it was the king, the queen, the members of the court, or the common people, the circumstances of the book of Esther become a vital lesson of how God's people can grow and literally flourish within the chaotic insanity and the evil of the world around us, within the chaos, confusion, the disease, the death, and pain.

As we go through chapter 2, we see that the call went out to replace Queen Vashti for another. The call went out far and wide to bring beautiful virgins, one of whom the king would select to replace Vashti.

Esther 2:5-8 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite. Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured when Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And Mordecai had brought with him Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women.

I want to stop there and add something. This morning's Berean talked about honoring your mother and father, and that those who do not lack great wisdom. We just read that Mordecai treated Esther as his daughter and she learned the wisdom and the strength that she needed by greatly honoring Mordecai, as we will see in a second.

Esther 2:10-12 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. [Here is wisdom that came from her adoptive father.] And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. Each young woman's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of the preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for the beautifying of the women.

Esther 2:15-18 Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter [Notice how many times it talks about the father-daughter relationship we have here.], to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more all the other woman, and she obtained grace and favor in the sight more than any other virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

Esther 2:20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai, as when she was brought up by him.

Again, brethren, just consider how much wisdom Esther had gathered from Mordecai, who was a godly man, and passed it down because she honored him. When I was reading the Berean this morning, I thought, boy, this really tied in well with the sermon. The wisdom that comes from being lovingly, carefully obedient to a parent just like we need to be with God and our parents who stand firm.

Although God is not mentioned throughout the book of Esther, it becomes obvious that under His sovereign authority all of this was happening for His purposes to be worked out, even if it was to this point of Esther and Mordecai had no idea how important their roles were going to be within God's plan and purpose to deliver His people within what He had determined to do within the difficult circumstances of a violent world around them. Mordecai and Esther were just people and God's power did all this, but Mordecai and Esther both had responsibilities that God had given them the ability to do that they fulfilled.

Toward the end of chapter 2, we see that Mordecai, who had been sitting at the gates to make sure he knew that Esther was safe, had overheard a plot to assassinate the king. He revealed the plot to Esther, who informed the king in Mordecai's name, so Mordecai's name is recorded in the chronicles of the king as the man who saved the king from assassination.

Most of you are quite familiar with this, so we are not going to go into it, but chapter 3 deals with Haman. Haman was a type of Hitler. He was a descendant of the Amalekites who hated the Jews, probably through the back door politicking and all those things that go on by those striving to put themselves in front of the pack in this world to serve themselves. He got himself appointed chief minister to the king.

Esther 3:2-6 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. Then the king's servants, who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily, and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai [they were Jews]. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

In spite of his hatred for Mordecai personally, Haman saw this as an opportunity to wipe out all the Jews, manipulating the capricious King Ahasuerus.

Esther 3:8-9 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten

thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

The king fell right into the Satan-inspired plot.

Esther 4:1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

One of the commentaries posited that Mordecai's distress here was in part that he himself had prompted this genocidal retaliation. But whatever the reason, it got the attention of Queen Esther. And when she sought to find out what was wrong, the messenger returned with an explanation and a plea from Mordecai to bring the king his case, the case of the people, before the king.

Esther 5:11-13 Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had himself advanced above the officials and the servants of the kingdom. Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one else but me to come in with the king to a banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see that Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

Brethren, you are all familiar with this very pivotal part of God's plan and purpose. But the foundation for the lesson here is, within this violent world that we live in, God is always very much in charge and in control. We skipped ahead through much of what Esther had done in wisdom to manipulate or move Haman into a position that he exposed himself as to what he was in chapter 5 and verse 1.

Mordecai said to Esther that she needed to plead for the people. Then Esther spoke in verse 10 of chapter 4.

Esther 4:10-17 Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner

court of the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death except for the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go into the king these thirty days." So they told Mordecai Esther's [response to his plea]. And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than any other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place [Again, here is God's sovereignty that Mordecai recognized.], but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have [This is really important because this is the mind of Mordecai that Esther had learned.] come to this kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Esther 5:1-3 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you—up to half the kingdom!"

As we go from this point through the end of the book we see that God turned Haman's cursed plan against Mordecai and the Jews back on Haman himself through the wisdom that Esther uses in patiently waiting on God, in fear and respect for God that she had learned from her father Mordecai. And then Mordecai himself received the long overdue reward from the king.

Chapter 6. I want to read this because it is another piece where we see God's hand clearly involved.

Esther 6:1-10 That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" And the king's servants who had attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." So the king said, "Who is in the court?"

Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. The king's servant said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for a man whom the king delights to honor." Now Haman [forgetting about his request to hang Mordecai] thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"

And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on his head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor!'"

Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you had spoken."

We can go through all the scriptures throughout this book that just will build a more complete case for why Esther is considered *Eshet Chayil* by the Jews, because it was through her that all the Jews in Persia were saved from Haman's final solution. But it was not her power and might that did it. It was

the power and might of God and her use of the wisdom that she had learned at the knee of her stepfather Mordecai.

But the bottom line lesson for us is that Esther, like the virtuous wife of Proverbs 31:30, recognized and waited on God to act because she feared the Lord with deep respect, and she feared letting down Mordecai and God's chosen people. Mordecai, as a father to her, led her to greatly fear and respect God because she feared and respected Mordecai.

Our main takeaway from this woman of valor that ties into the bottom line character trait, the ending character trait of the perfected wife, is the fear of God, not to let Him down. Again, I would like to repeat what John Ritenbaugh said in that Philippians Bible study regarding working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, a section of what he said.

As seen in the Proverbs 31 woman, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." This was the real difference between Queen Vashti and Queen Esther. Vashti would not come out of vanity, Esther did come before the king uncalled, because she waited and feared God rather than men.

As John said in that study, as we work towards the perfected character of the virtuous wife, we have come to the point where,

We love Him so much we do not want to do anything that will cast aspersions on His reputation. And so what we are afraid of is that we will not live up to what He might expect of us. That is where the fear is. We love Him. We are not afraid of Him, but we admire Him so much. He is so attractive to us. His holiness is so great we want to make sure it is not tarnished in any way. That is what I think it is, the fear of being unfaithful to Him and somehow making Him feel bad about us.

This is the lesson we should have gotten from the book of Esther even during this life of living under this great pressure of evil and evil world that Richard spoke about in the commentary, the sicknesses, the deaths, the sorrow, the pain, the trouble, the fickle leadership around us that disobeys and disenfranchises itself from the laws. We must be not afraid to let God down.

We must live in this world and learn how to fear God with great respect. As Proverbs 31:10-12 says, the virtuous wife's worth is "far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life."

Let us end today's sermon. Please turn with me to two scriptures.

II Timothy 2:20-21 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Now turn with me over to Romans 8 and a very, very familiar and important scripture for all of us that have been called to this precious gift and privilege that God has given.

Romans 8:28-31 And we know that all things [*all* things for us in this world of time, of trial, suffering, and death and sorrow] work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. [as Esther and Mordecai were] For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

May we all have a deep and abiding respect for our great God and follow the example of the virtuous woman.