

# A USELESS PROPOSAL

## Esther 2.1-4: A sincere but futile search to fix the king's new problem

**Theme:** You will search in vain to meet the needs that only God's provision can take care of in your life.

**This morning we are going to start Esther 2, and the first thing we see is that the King has a problem (v1).**

- But didn't he solve his problem in chapter 1 when he got rid of Vashti (the rebellious Gentile queen)?
- Yes... but now he has a new problem and it is very much like the problem many people experience today.
  - ✓ Like Ahasuerus, many people today try to “clean up their lives” (they do their best to turn from sin, but they do so without turning to follow Christ).
  - ✓ (Luke 11.24-26) And repentance without faith creates a whole new set of problems.
- Ahasuerus needs God's provision (Esther), and we'll see him receive that provision later in chapter 2.
  - ✓ But, before we get there, we are going to see the king put forth his best plan and best effort to fix his problem himself.
  - ✓ In the first half of this chapter, Ahasuerus is a great picture of the truth of Ecclesiastes 2.10-11.
  - ✓ He searches the world to find a solution but his efforts are in vain (He needs God to take care of him).

**Also, as we get into chapter 2, you'll notice that we're going to be spending more time talking about the personal application of the pictures and types in Esther.**

- Here's why: In chapter 1, because Vashti is a doctrinal/prophetic picture and type of the Church at the rapture, we could apply a lot of the content of that chapter directly to ourselves.
- But, now we are going to see the doctrinal types move into the Tribulation and so we'll be developing the personal pictures a little more as we look for those direct applications to us today.
- So, let's review very briefly...

**Historical Application: Esther 2 takes place about two or three years after Vashti is dethroned.**

- (Est 1.3) The history of the Book of Esther starts in the third year of the reign of King Ahasuerus.
- (Est 2.16) The king marries Esther in the seventh year of his reign.
- (Est 2.12) The search for a new queen, then, begins 12 month prior: In the sixth year of his reign, or about two or three years after Vashti is dethroned in the third year of his reign (Est 1.3).
- (Ezra 6.15) King Ahasuerus (which is his “throne name/title”) is Darius Hystaspes. The new temple in Jerusalem (after the 70 years captivity) is finished the same year as the king's search for a new bride.

**Doctrinal/Prophetic Application: We are going to see a picture of the first half of the Tribulation.**

- Esther 2 shows us a picture of the coming time immediately *following* the rapture of the Church (Est 1) and immediately *before* the revelation of the man of sin, as pictured in Haman (the enemy and persecutor of the Jews; Est 3). Esther 3 is a picture of the beginning of the “Great Tribulation.”
- And so, after the rapture of the Church (Est 1) and before the revelation of the man of sin (Est 3; the Great Tribulation), we see...
  1. The calling out of a group of “virgins”: (Est 2.1-4) A picture of the calling out of the **144,000**, and...
  2. The king marrying a Jewish Bride: (Est 2.17) A picture of the **reconciliation of Israel** with the Lord.

## **Personal Application: The struggle for victory in the spiritual life...**

- Ahasuerus pictures the soul of man (who by his free will decides and “rules” in his kingdom).
- Ahasuerus's kingdom pictures a man's life (the areas of his life over which he has influence).
- Vashti, the queen in Esther 1, is a picture of the natural spirit of man without Christ (rebellious).
- Esther, who becomes queen in chapter 2, is a picture of the new, regenerated spirit in Christ.
- And Mordecai, also arriving on the scene in chapter 2, is a picture of God's Holy Spirit who influences Ahasuerus (the soul) through queen Esther (the new, regenerated spirit of a saved man).
- And it is here, in the personal application, is where we'll begin this morning in Esther 2...

### **I. (v1) A New Problem for the King: Ahasuerus feels the conviction of his condition...**

- After about two or three years (after dethroning Vashti), the king finds himself with a new problem.

#### **A. The king would like a queen (the man needs a wife).**

1. He remembers Vashti: She was his wife and queen for years.
2. He remembers what Vashti had done: She rebelled and disobeyed the king, her husband.
3. He remembers what was decreed against her: It was severe and permanent... dethroned.
4. He remembers that he will never return to Vashti, nor will she return to him.

#### **B. This is what often happens to a lost person.**

1. In Esther 1, Ahasuerus (a picture of the soul) realized what he really had in Vashti (a picture of the natural spirit inherited from Adam: rebellious and uncontrollable).
2. Ahasuerus decided to dethrone her: The soul of the sinner repented of his sins (turned from them).
3. But: (Est 2.1) Something is not right... and Ahasuerus knows it (he “feels” it)... something's wrong.
  - a) (John 16.7-11) This is like the lost man who feels the conviction of the Holy Spirit of God.
  - b) He may have repented of his sins, but he still is not free of them (he is not saved).
4. The picture we see in Ahasuerus here is that of a lost man who has repented of his sins but who is still under the conviction of God's Spirit leading him to God's provision (Esther).

#### **C. And here is where many people (like Ahasuerus; Est 2.2ff) fail to respond correctly.**

1. Just watch how many people around you need to be entertained (distracted) just to get through life.
2. You see them fill their time with hobbies, movies, or anything else that will get their mind off their problem (the conviction they feel because something is “just not right” in their lives).
3. They have to do that (distract themselves, amuse themselves) because if they don't they run the risk of actually thinking about their lives.
  - a) They might ask themselves...
    - (1) Where did I come from? (~ origin)
    - (2) Why am I here? (~ meaning/purpose)
    - (3) How should I live? (~ morality)
    - (4) Where am I going when I die? (~ destiny)
  - b) And because they don't have a solid answer for any of those questions, they fear that too much time meditating on it will lead them to the only conclusion left:
    - (1) Their life is meaningless. There is no purpose to their existence. They are an... accident.
    - (2) That's life without God (without Christ): Empty, vain, without purpose or meaning.

4. And so here is Ahasuerus: He has a new problem—he feels the conviction of his condition...

a) He remembers Vashti and he remembers that he will never be with her again.

b) And thus begins a useless and futile plan to fix the king's new problem.

## II. (v2-4) A Futile Plan for the King: A sincere attempt to find a solution in the world...

### A. (v2a) The Origin of the Plan

1. The king's servants noticed the king's displeasure and they wanted to help out.

a) These would be people who worked and possibly lived in the royal palace. They would be some of the people who were around the king more often than many others.

b) (Est 1.3) They are also some of the people who have already experienced the king's generosity.

c) And so now, knowing the king well and having been blessed by the king before, they *sincerely* want to help. They see the king in need and with *good intentions* offer a plan to meet that need.

2. This is what happens just about every time God begins to do a work in a lost person.

a) God brings about conviction in their life. There may even be repentance and an effort to get rid of some of the “bad stuff” in the person's life (like we saw in Esther 1).

b) God is bringing that lost person to the point where he will recognize his need for God's provision in his life (Esther; salvation that comes from true conversion: repentance and faith).

c) And that that critical moment, it never fails that someone close to the lost person (family, friends, coworkers—like the servants to king Ahasuerus) will offer advice.

(1) They're *sincere* in their desire to help. They have *good intentions* of meeting the need.

(2) But they really don't have a clue about what that lost person needs. God does; they don't.

3. So the futile plan to meet the king's need originates from sincere, good intentioned servants...

### B. (v2b) The Idea of the Plan

1. The problem is clear: (v1) Ahasuerus is without a wife. Therefore, the servants' idea to fix that problem is equally clear: (v2-3) Get the king a woman!

a) Remember: (Est 1.1) There are 127 provinces from which to choose women for the king.

b) The servants propose to bring *all* the “fair young virgins” from *all* the 127 provinces of the kingdom (from North Africa and the Near East to India).

c) We're talking (easily!) about a thousand or more “fair young virgins” for the king to test drive.

2. The proposal, however attractive to the king, is totally and completely useless.

a) The king is obviously feeling his need: (v1) He needs a queen—he wants a wife.

(1) He obviously would like another woman (someone special) in his life.

(2) And his “friends” (the servants) are going to help him out.

b) And so with this proposal (sincere, good intentions) the king and his servants set out to meet the king's need... and they do so *in a way that seems best to them*: “Fair young virgins.”

(1) This may entertain and distract the king (it may keep him occupied) for a while, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that it's not going to end well.

(2) Here's the issue:

(a) It's like the sayings: “Beauty is only skin deep” and “Everything that shines ain't gold.”

(b) External beauty is *not* an indication of internal character. Who's to say the king won't find a pretty face on another Vashti?

(3) He needs something more than this, but...

3. This is exactly what the lost man will do, too.
  - a) He feels God's conviction and he knows he needs “something.” So, he puts together a totally useless plan based on his own ideas—according to what seems best to him at the time...
  - b) He will go from *religion to religion*, “test driving” each one to see if it will work to fix his problem. Or he'll go from *church to church...* or *hobby to hobby... project to project...*
  - c) And it could be that (like with the king with his “fair young virgins”) it's fun and entertaining for while (it could even make him happy and help him to forget the conviction he felt before).
  - d) But, it will never “fix the problem”; that kind of carnal, worldly, humanistic “search for meaning” in life will never meet his need.
  - e) He needs *God's* provision (forgiveness, the new birth, reconciliation—he needs Esther!).
4. And also, understand this: Even though the king's search is futile, God's provision is still available.
  - a) Futile: [def] Ineffective; useless; incapable of producing any result; vain; worthless.
    - (1) That's the description of the king's search for a new bride by “test driving” all the fair young virgins from all his provinces. Crazy! “Futile.”
    - (2) And that's the description of every lost man's “search for meaning” in this life as he goes from religion to religion, church to church, distraction to distraction... It's futile! Useless.
  - b) (Est 2.15-17) But, God's provision for him is still there: Esther.
    - (1) And Esther's beauty is not like the beauty of the others (the beauty the world offers). Esther had a natural beauty that set her apart from everyone else. She didn't need all the polish and shine of the world.
    - (2) (Rom 1.16-18) The gospel (God's provision for the lost man; the new, regenerated spirit that comes from being born again in Christ) is much more beautiful all by itself than all the glitter and shine this world could offer.
      - (a) In that provision is the forgiveness of sin and sins. It provides you with an entrance into God's family. There is provision for a new life, a better life... eternal life.
      - (b) (Gal 5.22-23) In that new, regenerated spirit there is a natural beauty that far surpasses *all* the temporal, fleshly, carnal beauty that this world offers us. *That's Esther.*
    - (3) The “problem” we see in Ahasuerus is that he is listening to the wrong people...
      - (a) He's listening to his servants, like the lost man will listen to lost family and friends.
      - (b) What he needs to do is listen to *Mordecai* (who raised Esther), like the lost man needs to listen to the gospel message preached by a Spirit-filled believer.
        - He needs to listen to the person who can introduce him to God's provision that will meet his need.
      - (c) If Esther would have arrived first, the king would never have listened to the useless proposal of a futile search for a humanistic solution to his problem.
        - We need to be filled with the Spirit and introduce lost people to God's provision by preaching to them the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.
5. The Doctrinal Application: (Est 2.2-3) The calling out of “fair young virgins” in the Tribulation.
  - a) Before we go on with the history and application of Esther 2, let's take a minute to think on the doctrinal and prophetic pictures and types in this calling out of fair young virgins.
  - b) The order of events in Esther gives us a general view of events in the last days.
    - (1) (Est 1) The Gentile queen is raptured out of her place of prominence on the earth because of her rebellion and lack of obedience to the king.
      - She pictures the Church of the last days that is raptured off the earth in judgment for her failure in her stewardship—raptured and taken to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

- (2) (Est 2.2) After the rapture of the Gentile queen, there is a calling out of some virgins; they are called into the presence of the king.
  - (3) (Est 2.15-17) A young Jewish lady becomes the wife of the king (a picture of the reconciliation of Israel with her estranged Husband, God).
  - (4) (Est 2.19) There is a second gathering together of the same virgins after Ahasuerus has received Esther as his wife and queen.
  - (5) (Est 3.1) “After these things” the enemy of the Jews proposes his persecution and genocide of the Jews (a picture of the beginning of the Great Tribulation when the covenant of peace is broken and the Antichrist begins his global persecution of the nation of Israel).
  - (6) Summary: The calling out of the virgins happens after the rapture of the Church (Est 1) and before the beginning of the persecution of the Jews in the Great Tribulation (Est 3).
    - In picture and type: It happens in the first half (first 3.5 years) of the Tribulation, during the time of “peace and safety.”
- c) The virgins called into the presence of the king are a doctrinal (prophetic) picture and type of the 144,000 called out by God during the Tribulation.
- (1) (Mat 25.1-13) They are the wise virgins that still have oil (picture of the Spirit) in their lamps when Christ comes to rapture them off the earth and take them into the marriage.
    - (a) In this parable it is evident that the virgins will be on the earth and raptured off the earth during the first half of the Tribulation (the time of “peace and safety”) because they all slumbered and slept.
    - (b) They are on the earth during a time of such peace and safety that even the wise virgins (the picture of the 144,000) slumber and sleep. There is no great persecution.
    - (c) This is a reference to the first half of the Tribulation Period (Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week).
  - (2) (Rev 7.1-8; esp. v4) These virgins in the Tribulation are 12,000 men from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, 144,000 in total.
    - (a) This first calling out to seal them is pictured in the first calling out of the “fair young virgins” at the beginning of Esther 2 (the beginning of the Tribulation).
    - (b) The 144,000 will go forth during the first half of the Tribulation (during the time of peace and safety) as witnesses of God—they go preaching.
    - (c) It could be that they have something to do with the reconciliation of Israel with God, an event that appears to happen close to the middle of the Tribulation (before the Antichrist is revealed as the great persecutor of the Jews).
  - (3) (Rev 14.1-5; esp. v4) These 144,000 are virgins, and they are called out by the king.
    - (a) This second calling out of the virgins is pictured in the second gathering of the virgins in Esther 2.19, at the end of Esther 2 right before Haman arrives on the scene in Esther 3 (i.e., the virgins are gathered together a second time at the end of the first half of the Tribulation, right before the beginning of the Great Tribulation).
    - (b) In this second gathering of the virgins, we see a picture and type of the mid-Tribulation rapture of the 144,000 before the beginning of the satanic persecution of the Jews on earth (in picture: Haman; Est 3).
    - (c) The 144,000 are seen in Revelation 7.1-8 being sealed during the Tribulation (first 3.5 years) and the second time we see them gathered together, in Revelation 14.1-5, they are in heaven before God's throne. They were raptured off the earth, just like the virgins in the parable of Matthew of 25.
  - (4) The virgins called into the presence of the king *twice* are a picture and type of the 144,000 called out by God during the Tribulation and then called to God in the mid-Trib rapture.
6. The king has a need and his servants propose a plan: They are going to call out all the fair young virgins from all the provinces of the kingdom. Now comes the strategy (the “how” of the plan)...

### C. (v3-4a) The Strategy of the Plan

1. (v3a) They propose to search all the provinces of the king's kingdom.
  - Just like the lost person will search the world over for something that will meet the need he feels because of God's conviction of sin in his life.
2. (v3b) They propose to gather together in the palace all the fair young virgins.
  - a) A lost person can search through every pretty thing the world has to offer him, and he will never find that which can meet his need. He may numb his pain... He may distract himself for a time... He may enjoy the journey... But it won't work. He'll still be in need—convicted and lost.
  - b) Note one thing (which we'll talk about later): (v3 cf. v8) They bring the virgins into the care of a chamberlain (eunuch) named Hege (or Hegai). Hegai also receives Ether, God's provision for king Ahasuerus.
3. (v3c) They propose to give to the fair young virgins whatever they need or want in order to beautify themselves (notice that is is “their” things: whatever they ask for, it's up to them).
  - a) (v13) She could wear anything she wanted into the king's presence when it was her turn.
  - b) And that is just how the world offers up it's seduction to lost men and women: All dressed up.
    - (1) These fair young virgins (in our personal pictures and types) represent that which the world offers to lost people as a solution to their need—the conviction they feel because of sin.
    - (2) They always come “dressed up” and pretty on the outside. It looks good... It tastes good... It feels good. But... it ain't good!
4. (v4a) They propose that the king choose whichever virgin seems right in his own eyes.
  - a) And that is the ultimate end of lost man's humanistic search for an answer to his problem: What ever pleases him at the moment, do it.
  - b) (Rom 3.11) But that kind of humanistic, “me-centered” search is futile and useless because man is *not* seeking God. He is not seeking God's provision by faith; he is seeking any provision that will work... *by sight* (and basing his decision on his own opinion: whatever pleases him).
  - c) (Jud 21.25) And when men do that which is right in their own eyes, bad things happen (just like in the Book of Judges).
5. But, in the midst of all this mess...

### D. (v4b) The Goal of the Plan

1. The servants clearly state their goal in this plan: Replace Vashti (“...queen instead of Vashti...”).
  - a) It's a good goal! They have good intentions! They are sincere in their desire to help the king!
  - b) But, their whole plan to get it done is a total and complete hash!
    - (1) It's like the old saying: *The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*
    - (2) It's like Proverbs 14.12: *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*
2. Doctrinal Application: Romans 11.25-26
  - a) This is the same goal that God has after our rapture: Replace us with someone better!
  - b) After our removal from the earth, God will set in motion His plan to replace the Gentile bride (the Church) with a Jewish Bride that is better than she (Israel reconciled).

## **E. (v4c) The Approval of the Plan**

1. It doesn't seem like the king had to think very long on this idea: He likes it! (Obviously.)
2. But, there's a problem with this solution to his problem: It ain't gonna work.
  - a) Sex is not love. And physical beauty is not the true beauty of a person. Lining up fair young virgins for the king to test drive is not the answer (however entertaining it may be for the king).
  - b) For the lost person, it's the same way: He can go from religion to religion, church to church, hobby to hobby, career to career, project to project... and regardless of how entertaining it may be, it ain't gonna work.
  - c) It's all Ecclesiastes 2.10-11: It's vain, futile, useless; and it will end only in the vexation of your spirit (it will simply compound the problems you had in the first place).

### **Conclusion:**

#### **King Ahasuerus made a good decision in Esther 1: Get rid of Vashti (repent)!**

- But that's only half the equation because now the king needs to replace her with someone who is better.
- And in Esther 2 we see the king being offered a useless proposal by his servants to go on a futile search for a new queen by “test driving” fair young virgins from all the provinces of his kingdom.

#### **King Ahasuerus needs the provision God has for him: Esther.**

- And we will see God's providential preparation of Esther in the following passage.

#### **Our application this morning:**

- Lost person:
  - ✓ A clean life is not salvation. Getting rid of Vashti is only half the equation of conversion.
  - ✓ Save yourself some pain and turn to God for His provision of salvation in Christ (Esther!).
  - ✓ Don't waste your time (waste your life) chasing after the pleasures of sin that are but for a season. That may entertain and distract you... but it won't fix the problem. Turn to Christ now.
- Christian:
  - ✓ Let's be about letting the Spirit of God fill us (by knowing God's will and doing God's will).
  - ✓ Let's be about introducing lost people to “Esther” (God's provision for their greatest need).
  - ✓ Let's be about preaching the gospel to the lost (wherever and whenever we can).