

The Power of a Humble Heart

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It's very easy to read the book of Esther and see only a series of historical events, a tale of God working on behalf of His people to save them from certain destruction. And yes, it certainly is that... but it's so much more.

The book of Esther tells the story of a young Jewish woman named Esther and how God used her to save His people. But it also tells the story of a king named Xerxes, the most powerful ruler in the world of his time, and how his love for that young woman changed the course of an entire empire... as well as the course of his own life. For you see, even after Haman's evil had been exposed, his queen's life was still in danger. Xerxes's love for Esther caused him to make decisions that would seem unbelievable if a modern leader made them.

For all the miracles God performs in the book of Esther, the miracle of one king's love for his queen may be the most amazing of them all. And that story is told in Esther 8-10.

The grief King Xerxes felt was almost more than he could bear.

He was the most powerful man on Earth,
ruler of the largest empire the world had ever seen...
and yet he had been used by those around him.
He had surrounded himself with the wrong people
and they had played him for a fool.

Now the woman he loved was going to die—
he had signed the cursed orders himself!—
and he was helpless to save her.

Esther was so unlike her predecessor, Vashti.

Vashti had been selfish and vain,
an ambitious woman who abused her power.
He had endured her poor behavior
Until she challenged his authority in public.
After that, he had actually enjoyed deposing her.

But early on in his search for a new queen,

Esther stood out from the others.
She quickly became a favorite of Hegai, the harem master,
and it didn't take long for Xerxes to learn why.
From the first moments he spent with her,
her kind heart and gentle spirit drew him nearer.

And when he finally made her his queen, *she didn't change.*

Never before had he seen a queen with such humility!
She knew she pleased him, yet she never took advantage of his affection.
He had been unable to believe his good fortune.

And now, Haman's pride was going to cost him his queen.

It had been all he could do to keep from
ripping the man's head off with his own hands!
And to make matters worse, he learned that Haman had done it all
simply to destroy Mordecai,
the man who had stopped a royal assassination
without ever asking for recognition
and whom he now knew to be Esther's stepfather.

Xerxes had hanged Haman
and given everything that traitor owned to Esther...
but it still wasn't enough to save his queen.

Before he learned of Haman's treachery, he had followed Haman's advice
and sent out a royal order to have the king's enemies killed...
but they were Haman's enemies, not the king's,
and they included Mordecai and Esther. *His beloved Esther!*

And what had Esther said, when she exposed Haman to him?
"Had he only condemned us to slavery, I would have said nothing,
for it would be too small a matter to burden my king with."
Such humility! Such strength!
It had broken his heart, but it had also cleared his mind:
He would NOT lose this woman, no matter the cost!

When a Persian king sent out a decree, it could never be reversed,
not even by the king himself.
He was powerless to stop the first decree...
*However, that didn't mean he couldn't issue a second
decree!*

But what should it be? Who could he trust to help him find an answer?

He smiled to himself. He knew *exactly* who he could trust.

Xerxes looked into Esther's pleading eyes,
then took his signet ring from his finger—
the ring he used to seal official documents—
and handed it to her.

He placed one hand on Esther's shoulder and the other on Mordecai's, and said,
"I can't reverse the first decree, but I can issue a new one.
Decide how your people can best defend themselves against their enemies,
and send them a new decree,
issued in my name and sealed with my ring.
That way, it will have the same authority as the first decree...
and no one will be able to reverse it."

And his queen did not let him down.

The decree she and Mordecai sent out followed exactly
the punishment he had meted out to Haman:

If anyone dared to attack the Jews,
the decree authorized them to defend themselves,
even to kill their attackers if necessary,
then take the attackers' property as their own.

In fact, many people in the Empire became Jews themselves,
just so they could share the protection of the king's new decree.
And the king's officials throughout the Empire helped the Jews as well.

When the time finally came,
the Jews defended themselves but didn't plunder their enemies,
although the king's decree allowed it.
Perhaps they meant this act was a sign of loyalty—
they merely desired to protect themselves, not to plunder his empire—
Xerxes didn't know for sure.
But from that day on, he knew he was popular among the Jews.

Xerxes also allowed Esther to issue another decree,
declaring a holiday to celebrate the Jew's deliverance from their enemies.
Haman had cast lots, called *purim*,
to decide on what day he would kill the Jews,
so the celebration was named Purim.
(It's still celebrated by Jews today.)

Xerxes made Mordecai his new prime minister,
and he proved to be a wise and trusted advisor to his king.

As for King Xerxes and Queen Esther,
so far as we know, they lived happily ever after.

In Psalm 147:6 it says that
God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Perhaps humility is best learned through love,
for only a king who had learned humility
could have won both the blessing of God
and the love of Esther.