

**ST PAUL'S CHURCH (TONDEBOSCH)**

**SUNDAY 8 AUGUST 2021**

**READINGS: ESTHER 1:10-22:10// PSALM 130//**

**EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2// JOHN 6:35, 41-51**

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*O God who took human flesh and whose care for us is painstaking and joyful, we praise you for your love in creation and for making all people in your image. We thank you for the gift of human relationship and for the gift of women for the richness and range of their influence in society, in the church and in our families*

The month of August is known as Women's month and tomorrow the 9 August we will celebrate National Women's day.

We celebrate women's day to remind women they are special and precious to God and he wants to use our womanhood to work for him and spread the gospel. He don't want us to limit or restrict ourselves and say we can't do it.

Today I would like us to reflect on two women from the book of Esther: Queen Vashti and Esther – women that

we not normally preach about but who are strong and powerful each in their own way.

Let me give you some historical background of what was going on in the days of Esther. After King David died his son Solomon ruled after him. The reign of Solomon was the golden age for Israel. There was Peace and prosperity for all.

But after Solomon things got bad. The nation could not decide who should be the next king, and so the nation divided. — into the northern and the southern kingdoms.

Around 200 years after the division, the northern kingdom, was taken into captivity by Assyria, and around the year 600 BC, the Southern Kingdom itself was also captured and carried off into captivity by Babylon. (by the rivers of Babylon)

They were captive for 70 years and later the Babylonian empire fell to Persia, and later Cyrus the ruler of the Persian Empire, allowed Israel to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple. Some Israelites including Esther and Mordechai stayed behind

So this is where our story of today begin

### *Queen Vashti*

In Esther 1 v 10-11 we read that King Xerxes (ZURK-KEES) had a Great Feast in which he had invited the entire leadership who ruled 127 provinces throughout his kingdom. During this celebration, he called for his queen, Vashti to join him.

But in v 12 we read “*When the attendance delivered the king’s command Queen Vashti refused to come*”

Vashti chose to reject the king at his greatest moment, a moment when all eyes were on the King and his queen. She denied the king her beauty, her presence, and her glory

Many people ignore the role that Queen Vashti, the Gentile played in this story. But, the character of Vashti was as zealous (ZILOU) as that of Esther, the Jew.

The reason why Vashti did not come, is because it was considered shameful to show her face to the crowd. When she went out, she went veiled. The king was trying to

show off her face, not her body. Since this would be undignified and beneath her the queen refused.

She had to make a decision --- If she went, she would be scorned and shamed by all who saw her and especially by other ladies of the royal house who have never themselves shown their faces to the public. And if she didn’t go, which is well, she hoped for the best from her husband the king.

She had to make a decision but whatever side it will have consequences and she decided not to go

**Esther 1:12b. ...therefore the king was furious, and burned with anger**

He was humiliated because his wife disobeyed him. He is a king with all of his wealth and power and friends, but he cannot even get his own wife to obey him.

He asked the advice from his advisers and *They advised him to issue a royal decree (order) that must be written in the laws of Persia and Media which cannot be revoked that Vashti must never again enter the presence of King Xerxes (Zurk-kees) and that the king must give her royal position to someone else”.*

What they were saying is “We can’t have this! If we let Vashti get away with it, all women will treat their husbands this way!” *“Ironically, the king ends up publicizing his embarrassing plight by ordering throughout the empire what he himself could not accomplish in his own palace!”*

What we have here is the abuse of power and wealth over the poor and the marginalized women

My dear brothers and sisters sometimes we have to stand up to say No to certain things despite the consequences

- Vashti stood up against the abuse of women
- What about us?
- If we look around and see the abuse of women in our communities in our society—do we stand up and say enough is enough or do we , think it is not me being abuse or its fine I have to obey my husband, I must do it

### **Esther**

In Esther 2 v 2 we read *“Then the King’s personal attendance proposed “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king”*

***When the King’s order and decree had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the Royal house, Esther was among them”***

Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin because she had no parents

As I reflected and interpreted the text I wondered why Esther would be willing to parade in front of the king why would she exposed herself like this when Vashti refused to do it and here we have Esther who is a Jew willing to do it. Why did she not refuse? ----can any good come from a story where a king exercise and abuse his power?

It is often easy to look at other people’s decisions and judge them, thinking that we know clearly what is right and what is wrong and that if we were in their shoes, we would have known what the right thing is to do.

You see my dear friends behind all of this is God’s hand You will notice that God’s name is not mentioned once in the Book of Esther yet God is at worked behind the scene.

In v 17 we read *“Now the King was more attracted to Esther and she won his favour and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen.”*

Here was Esther coming from a broken, tragic home , struggling to work out how to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, the very picture of weakness - an orphan, a woman, a Jew – an outcast. She had no power and influence.

However, we see the overruling hand of God opening the door for his people through Esther. God is a God who moves and works in the lives of men and women. God uses an abused, outcast girl, hiding her Judaism in fear to save his people. Someone who said I am going to take a chance to bring about change to bring something NEW to my people.

Someone who said I will get out of my comfort and by doing that she saved her people/her nation

How many times don't we complain and are shocked when we read and even witness the abuse of women and children in the country, in our communities, but we do nothing.

My dear friends are we willing to come out of our comfort zones and take the risk to speak and fight against the abuse of our women and children and uplift and empower our women and children.

## CONCLUSION

*Women are a reflection of the glory of God. Today we honour the women of all times and all places: We especially pray and give thanks for all women who played an important role in our lives. Our mothers, grandmothers, sisters' aunts, foster mothers, teachers, who took the risk and step out of their comfort zone to help and empower us May their loving hearts and nurturing spirits be blessed with strength and joy.*

*Let us now light a candle for all women who played an important role in our lives and in this Church who has passed on*

*AMEN*