

WORLDLY PLEASURES

Esther 2.12-14: The Attraction of Worldly Pleasures

Theme: The promises of worldly pleasures are attractive, and they can produce personal gratification, but they cannot solve man's problem!

Today is the day Ahasuerus gets to put his plan into action!

- (v1) After dethroning Vashti (a good decision!), the king realizes something is “wrong.” He knows he needs something... a wife... a queen.
 - ✓ He's like a lost man under conviction knows he needs something.
- (v2-4) And so his servants lend a hand and propose a “wonderful” idea solve the king's problems.
 - ✓ It's like so many lost people who get carnal, humanistic suggestions on how to “fix” their “problems.”
 - ✓ But, the king likes the idea, so they begin to bring in “fair young virgins” from all over his kingdom.
- (v5-11) However, God is working behind the scenes!
 - ✓ Esther is also called to the palace among the other fair young virgins. Esther is God's provision for king Ahasuerus (she is the only one who will truly meet his need and solve his problem).

Now: (v12-14) The women have been gathered together... it's time to put the plan into action!

- (v12) We are going to see a huge investment of time and money into the *preparation* of the women.
- (v13) There is a good lesson for us in the *presentation* of the women to Ahasuerus.
- (v14) But there's a *problem* with the plan (and it shows us what's wrong with the world's solutions to man's problems today—especially the problem of sin and salvation).

I. (v12) The Preparation of the Women: A huge investment!

A. It's an entire year of preparation!

1. Every one of the maidens that will be presented to the king as a candidate for queen has to go through 12 months (and full year) of preparation before she will ever see the king.
2. It's called “the days of their purifications” (in the sense of “cleaning them up” and making them “nice and presentable”).
 - a) They first go through six months of oil of myrrh (akin to perfume: myrrh is an aromatic spice and it's mixed with oil to be rubbed all over the body and make you smell good).
 - b) They next go through six months of “with sweet odours” (which refers to cleaning with soap).
3. That is a huge investment of time and money! How many women? And they *all* go through this “purification” (cleaning, beautifying) process for an entire year!

B. It's just like how the world operates!

1. Remember: Ahasuerus is a picture of the soul of man... still lost, without Christ, in Esther 2.12.
 - a) (Est 1) He's turned away from Vashti (a picture of the rebellious human/natural spirit in man).
 - b) (Est 2.1) But, that's not enough... He feels the “conviction” of something not being right (like the lost man who is trying to “clean up” his life feels under the conviction of the Spirit).
 - c) (Est 2.2-4) And so he turns to the world and humanistic solutions to his problem: Whatever seems right in his own eyes.

- d) And the world is happy to comply!
- (1) They gathered together *all* the fair young virgins from *all* the provinces (just like the world: there are so many “pretty solutions” to our problems that come from all over!).
 - (2) And the world will offer all of it's “attractive solutions” to our problems... And they will make *huge* investments to do it.
2. The only problem is that the solutions that come out of the world are *superficial*.
- a) The fair young virgins are “fair”—they're beautiful and attractive! And they have been made even *more* so by the investment of time and money over the course of a year.
 - b) But, it's all external beauty...
3. Think about this investment in each and every one of the maidens that will be presented to the king.
- a) After all the oil, the myrrh, the soaps, the time, the effort, the preparation... What do you have?
 - b) You have a very pretty, aromatic appearance... but it's a facade (it's all “packaging”). Why...?
 - (1) Because all that nice, pretty smell goes away in a day or two if you don't bathe again.
 - (2) Because all the expensive oil and myrrh (not to mention the clothes each woman had the liberty to choose)... is gone in a day (either gone or starts to stink and needs a wash).
 - c) But that is exactly like what the world offers us! “New and shiny!”
 - (1) Whatever the world offers us, it usually comes in a pretty package that says “new and improved,” and it gets our attention.
 - (2) But, it doesn't take long for the “new” to wear off... and then what? Well... it's not as “shiny” and attractive as it was before...
 - (3) [Here's the key!] Once the “new” wears off of one thing, what happens?
 - (a) The world offers us a *new* solution to our problems it's pretty! and attractive! and smells good! A
 - (b) And off we go after that one... until the novelty wears off (but there's another maiden right behind her).
4. Do *not* allow yourself to be deceived by appearances.
- a) You can deceive a lot of people with pretty packaging (dress up the outside—the facade—and you and dupe a lot of people).
 - b) This is exactly what happens to the lost man when he feels the conviction of the Spirit.
 - (1) The world offers him a pretty, shiny, new, promising solution: Good works (and then when that doesn't work), religion (and when the doesn't work), sex... career... retirement... fun...
 - (2) It's one fair maiden after another... and it's all a superficial facade that goes away in time.
 - c) And, though it's sad to say, many *churches* today are just like that this.
 - (1) Why? Because they've learned how to “build a church” from the marketing techniques of the world.
 - (a) The world draws people in with pretty packaging on superficial solutions.
 - (b) A lot of churches today are drawing people in with pretty packaging on superficial ministries.
 - (2) They're “worldly churches” (“adapted to culture”) and so they function just like the world.
 - (a) The only difference between a market-driven church and a market-driven car dealer is the product they are “selling” as the solution to man's need.
 - (b) You ought to read *This Little Church Went to Market* by Gary Gilley.

- (c) The world offers “fair young virgins” to lost people as solutions to their problems. The church ought not! Esther is God's provision... and we ought to be about getting her into the lives of lost people.

C. [Review: v12] The Preparation of the Women: A huge investment... in so much “packaging”!

II. (v13) **The Presentation of the Women: Beauty that deceives!**

A. “Then thus...”: After an entire year of preparation, each maiden comes before the king.

1. She is well prepared! She is clean. She smells good. She is dressed in her best! Whatsoever she desires on the day of her presentation, she gets it!
2. Each of these maidens is attractive! Think about it...
 - a) The scour the 127 provinces and select all the fair young virgins (no ugly ducklings!).
 - b) Then they put them in a 12-month regimen of “purification” to get them ready.
 - c) And on the day of their presentation to the king, each maiden receives whatsoever she desires to adorn her beauty even more.

B. We should never doubt for a minute that what the world has to offer is... attractive!

1. I think we often have this idea that people in the world are “miserable in sin.”
 - a) Maybe some are... and all will be sooner or later. But, most are not miserable.
 - b) Sin (just like these “fair young virgins”) has its pleasure... for a season.
2. Think about Moses: Hebrews 11 says some interesting things about Moses and his life...
 - a) And since Egypt is a type of the world in the Bible, we can see a pretty good parallel between what Egypt offered Moses and what the world offers us (and lost people) today.
 - b) (Heb 11.24) Power: Egypt offered Moses power—a position of power (authority & influence).
 - (1) He was the son of Pharaoh's daughter! He had a good name... a good reputation... power!
 - (2) And the world offers us the same... if we will play its game and jump through the hoops. “Climb the corporate ladder... Build a career... Build your resume... Advance... Retire...”
 - c) (Heb 11.25) Pleasure: Egypt offered Moses pleasure... the pleasure of sin (fun!).
 - (1) Sin is fun. And so... it's attractive (especially to the lost man).
 - (2) How many people have sold their eternity because they don't want to give up the fun they're having in sin?
 - (3) Just like these maidens that were sent before the king (each very attractive!), so sin entices many with its promise of pleasure... and fun. Sin is attractive.
 - (4) But, it's all a facade. It's a temporary, fleeting pleasure. It will never satisfy our needs.
 - d) (Heb 11.26) Riches: Egypt offered Moses riches and treasure...
 - (1) The world does the same: Money! How many people are chasing after money in the world?
 - (2) Yes, we need money (eat, live, minister). But will it solve all our problems? No.
3. Just like these fair young virgins offered to Ahasuerus, what the world has to offer lost people (all of us, really) is attractive... but there's a problem...

III. (v14) **The Problem with the Women: Superficial pleasure doesn't work!**

A. Historical Application: Understand what's happening here...

1. (v13) The maiden comes to the king “out of the house of the women.”
2. (v14) She arrives “in the evening” and “on the morrow” she leaves.

- a) And when she leaves the next morning, she goes to the “*second* house of the women” where we see another steward, Shaashgaz, the keeper of the *concubines*.
 - b) And the young lady doesn't come before the king again unless she's specifically called.
3. It's clear what's going on: The king is “test driving” each of the fair young virgins to see which one he likes best.
- a) And when he is done with one, she becomes a “concubine” in his royal harem.
 - b) The history of what we are reading here is pretty sad (for the women).
 - c) Side Note: I think this is a good opportunity to make an important observation...
 - (1) Compare the treatment of women in the East (especially people from the near east, like Ahasuerus) and the treatment of women in the West (where there is a greater influence of Christianity).
 - (2) What we see in Esther 2 is the exact same treatment of women we see in many eastern religions, like Islam. For example...
 - (a) Muhammad, the found and leader of Islam, had 14 wives (the youngest was 9 yrs old).
 - (b) In Islam, a man is permitted to have up to four wives (interesting that Muhammad got 14, not 4... I guess he was “grandfathered in” before the four-wife rule hit).
 - (3) The point to make here is this: The Bible is not a male chauvinist book.
 - (a) The Bible protects the rights of women and elevates them in society.
 - (b) There is no other system (political or religious) in the world, outside the Bible, that gives more rights, opportunities, and liberty to women.

B. Personal Application: The lost man will seek in vain for a solution to his problem in the world...

1. The whole “search” by Ahasuerus is a picture of the lost man “experiencing” all the world has to offer to “fix” the “problem” he feels (conviction by the Spirit... that “lostness” without Christ).
 - a) Remember his goal in all of this: (v1) He wants a wife, a new queen.
 - b) Remember the picture in all of this: Ahasuerus dethroned Vashti, a good decision (like the lost man who turns away from his rebellious, natural, human nature and wants to do right).
 - c) Remember the problem: (v2-4) He's seeking a humanistic solution to a problem only God can solve (he needs Esther... a picture of a new, regenerated spirit).
2. And so Ahasuerus dives in to experience all the world has to offer! It's pretty! It's promising!
 - a) And, like Hebrews 11.25 says, sin has it's pleasure... for a season. It's entertaining.
 - b) For the lost man...
 - (1) ...it could be something just like we're seeing with Ahasuerus: Sex. How many people look for love or some sense of “belonging” in physical relationships? Lots!
 - (2) ...it could be religion, like those who bounce from religion to religion.
 - (3) ...it could be church, like those who go from church to church, looking for that “something” that will solve the problem they feel inside (conviction!).
 - (4) ...it could be anything the world has to offer (and it's usually very attractive to us at the moment): A new job, sports, drugs, television, a new hobby, a new toy (whatever!)...
3. And the results for the lost man are the same results we see in Ahasuerus's life:
 - a) The “new” maiden presents herself, and she's very attractive. So, he takes her and tries her out for a while. But, after a time, she's not so new and attractive anymore... so he gets rid of her.

- b) You see, all you have to do is wait and there will be something “more attractive” that will come along later. That's how the world operates! It keeps us going from one attractive maiden to the next, each promising us our “best life now.”
- c) And, frankly, this is how many *churches* operate today, too (because they have learned how to run their churches from world).
- (1) They offer the “attractive maiden” to the people: A “cutting edge” ministry that's “adapted to culture” and “fun” and “exciting” and “entertaining.”
 - (2) But, they have to keep offering a new, pretty maiden every so often because the people (like Ahasuerus) get bored with yesterday's entertainment. We need something new!
 - (3) And then when that one is all used up, they put her on the trash heap with the rest of the concubines and offer up yet another pretty novelty to the people...
 - (4) We call that “change” and “change is good.” I call that “apostasy.” A worldly church (a church that “draws them in” like the world) is an apostate church.
- d) I would prefer the unchanging Word of God and a ministry based on that unchanging Word.
- (1) It may not be “new and shiny” like these fair young virgins paraded before the king every day.
 - (2) But a church and a ministry like that will have an unchanging natural beauty that far surpasses the facade, superficial beauty of what the world has to offer.
 - (3) It's the difference between these dressed-up maidens and... Esther. Esther is God's provision, and I want that. I've had enough of the superficiality of the world.

Conclusion:

So, here is our lesson this morning: The promises of worldly pleasures are attractive, and they can produce personal gratification, but they cannot solve man's problem!

(Col 2.8) The promises of the world may be attractive... but, it's all deceitful.

- All those worldly solutions to our problems only deceive us: Attractive on the outside, but empty on the inside (totally useless and superficial; they entertain for a season, but leave us in our need).
- There is *nothing* in this world that will satisfy the need of man. It's a game, like with Ahasuerus: Today he's entertained with something new... and tomorrow he'll want something different. And nothing solves his problem.

(Col 2.9-10) The solution to man's problem (and problems!) is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- If you are lost: Don't let the attractive solutions the world offers you deceive you. Fun and entertainment will keep you amused until you drop off into hell. Wake up. Sober up. You must be born again!
 - ✓ We'll talk about God's solution to lost man's problem in our next passage... about Esther.
- If you are saved: Church and Christianity are not about fun and entertainment (feeling good).
 - ✓ From Gilley's book: *Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether. The main business of entertainment is to please the crowd, but the main purpose of authentic Christianity is to **please the Lord.***
 - ✓ Let's live for that: Pleasing the Lord. Let's not be deceived by the attractive solutions the world offers us day in and day out. The Lord is our solution. Let's seek Him (to know Him and follow Him).
 - ✓ And how do we do that? **Read the Bible and do what it says.**