

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 23 August 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Winds of Providence (Part 2)

Esther 1:12-22

In the late 1500's, the Spanish navy was, by far, the largest and most powerful navy in the world. Spain was also a stronghold of Roman Catholicism; and King **Philip II** considered himself a defender of the Roman Catholic faith. And so, with the blessing of **Pope Sixtus V**, Philip concocted a plan to crush Protestantism (as well as to expand his vast empire). An enormous fleet of vessels—which the Spanish called “the Invincible Armada”—was built for the purpose of invading England, toppling the English monarchy, and converting England back to Catholicism. The ships (which they called *galleons*) were enormous for their time. In these 141 ships were 10,138 sailors, and 19,315 soldiers. They had 1,500 brass guns, and 1,000 iron guns. King Philip commissioned the commander of the fleet, Alonso do Guzmán, to sail up the English Channel, and join forces with the Flemish navy (which consisted of 60,583 troops, and 3,650 cavalry). From there, they planned to sail to England, launch a ground invasion, and overthrow Queen Elizabeth. On the 30th of May of 1588, this great fleet was docked at Lisbon; and there, at the dock, King Philip himself knelt down and prayed for a smashing victory over England.¹

However, things didn't go as planned (to say the least)! First of all, bad weather delayed the Armada from the very start, and spoiled all element of surprise. Then, between the 29th of July and the 8th of August, the Spanish and English engaged in battles off the coasts of Plymouth, Portland Bill, the Isle of Wight, Calais, and Gravelines; and every time, the Armada was soundly defeated, and scattered. Even though the English were outgunned 2 to 1, the small English ships were able to outmanoeuvre the large, bulky Spanish ships with clever tactics. However, it wasn't merely the savvy of the English that won this war: *it was the weather*. The winds were always blowing against the Armada, and slowing them down. As the English ships were skirting around the Spanish ships, the wind always shifted at just the right time, to the advantage of the English. At Gravelines on 8 August, the Armada was nearly run aground on the Dutch coast; but then, the winds shifted, and allowed them to escape into the North Sea, with the English hot on their tail. However, as they were sailing around the coasts of Scotland and Ireland, a huge storm pounded them; and 24 ships were either sunk or run aground.² Incredibly, only 4 Spanish ships were actually sunk in battle; but a total of 63 ships was lost in one way or another!³ On the 31st of July, days before the final defeat of the Armada, the Duke of Parma sent a message back to Philip, in which he said, “God knows how grieved I am at this news, at a time when I hoped to send your Majesty congratulations. I will only say that this must come from the hand of the Lord, who knows well what He does.”⁴

The Duke of Parma was spot-on right! God truly knows well what He does. England didn't win because they were the “good guys” and the Spanish the “bad guys,” or because they had the “right” religion. (The Church of England was never biblically sound; and, like the Catholic Church, it persecuted dissenters—including Baptists.) No, England won for one simple reason: **God, in His Providence, *willed it*.**

Looking back in history, we can see that on account of this naval victory, the Scriptures continued to have a place of protection in England; and the Gospel eventually spread throughout the world!

Now, if you think this introduction sounds similar to the introduction to last week's sermon, you're right! Once again, we are talking about the "winds of Providence." Just as God shifted the winds in the English Channel in 1588, so that His Gospel could, in the future, spread throughout the world, so God gently shifted events in the Persian court of King Ahasuerus 2,500 years ago, so that six years later, the Jews might be saved from the wrath of a madman named Haman. It *seemed* that God was absent; yet, just as wind cannot be seen, so no one could see, at *that time*, that God was already working, in advance, to save His people from destruction. The title of this message is *The Winds of Providence (Part 2)*.

Read Esther 1:7-22.

I. The virtue of Vashti (v. 12)

For 180 days, Ahasuerus had been throwing an ongoing series of conferences and feasts for the governors of his kingdom. Throughout those six months, the wine had flowed freely; but now, they were capping off this long conference with seven days of non-stop feasting. One can only imagine how drunk these men must have been! In **verse 10**, we are told that by the seventh day, "*The heart of the king was merry with wine.*" In this disgraceful state, Ahasuerus was not thinking rationally; and he made a decision that would lead to the end of his marriage. He sent his seven chamberlains to Vashti to command that she appear before him and his male guests, so that he could show off her beauty to them.

Now, I find it interesting that Ahasuerus sent *all seven* of his chamberlains to fetch Vashti. Why is this important? Because a chamberlain was no ordinary servant. A chamberlain was a "eunuch"—a servant who had been surgically emasculated, so that he couldn't have a family. Eunuchs were emasculated so that they would have no personal interests (such as caring for a family) that might conflict with their absolute loyalty, and singular devotion, to the king. A eunuch was a household governor—a keeper of the royal bedchambers. A eunuch's job was to oversee the protection of the royal family. However, they were usually much more than guardians of the royal family. They were highly-trusted counsellors, and close advisors to the king. They were often princes, with rule over a portion of the kingdom, or charge over the royal treasury. These seven chamberlains were powerful representatives of the king; and one or two of them could certainly have done the job of relaying this message to Vashti. Yet, Ahasuerus commissioned *all seven* of them to do the job. Did the king, even in his drunkenness, realise that the queen might not *want* to appear before hundreds of drunken men, and be ogled by them? Did he send all seven chamberlains to Vashti to put extra pressure on her, so that she would be sure to come? It seems likely. If so, this would reveal a tension between the king and queen. Not all appears to have been well in their relationship!

So, then, what was Vashti's reaction to this command? Let's look again at **verse 12. (Read Esther 1:12.)** Can you imagine this? Vashti *refused* to come at the king's bidding! She was saying "no" to a man who had the power to have her beheaded immediately! And make no mistake about it: this man *was* capable of such a thing. Vashti couldn't rely on the assumption that the king loved her too much to punish her, because there probably was *not* any deep emotional bond between them. (In **chapter 4**, we will see that Ahasuerus hadn't spent an evening with Esther, or even had an audience with her, for more than a month: and he *really liked* Esther! How much less bond must there have been between him and Vashti?)

Why, then, did Vashti refuse to come? Was it because she was vain, and proud, and contrary? Well, that *may* have been part of it. Not knowing the Lord, and having been raised in wealth and nobility, and now being queen, she probably *did* have a proud heart; and she probably did *not* say "no" to the king's command with a meek and quiet spirit. Yet, even a proud person can submit and say "yes" when his *life* is at stake! There seems to have been something in Vashti that drove her to resist the king's command, even though she knew she might lose her life: and I believe that this "something" was a certain sense of **virtue and decency**.

You see, up to this point in the feast, the men and the women had been kept separate. It was actually against *Persian custom* for women to appear publicly with men in a feast. The Persians had at least that much virtue. Even though they were spiritually blinded, they still had enough sense to realise that bad things happen when men and women get drunk together. Yet, the king, in his drunkenness, broke this protocol; and Vashti refused to submit to it. Something in her said, "This is wrong." That voice was the *conscience* that God has given to every person. **Romans 2:14-15** says, "*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)*"

Now, had Ahasuerus asked his wife to do something lewd or immoral? Had he commanded her to appear immodestly dressed, or to do a lusty dance for them? The Bible doesn't say that he had required anything like this. However, one can only imagine what might have happened if she *had* walked into a room filled with hundreds of stone-drunk men. Who knows what vile passions might have been stirred up, and what vile things might have been said or done? As we saw in **Proverbs 23** last week, alcohol loosens the inhibitions, and causes men to "**behold strange women**" and to "**utter perverse things.**" Alcohol inflames lustful desires. It is the devil's drink; and it has been one of the main aids of immorality throughout most of human history. The seven chamberlains were, themselves, probably intoxicated to some degree as they went to fetch Vashti; and if so, it's no wonder that she was repulsed by this command. Her husband had failed in one of his primary husbandly duties—that of protecting his wife; and since *he* wouldn't protect her virtue, she figured that she had no choice but to protect herself. This reminds me of something that another pagan king said centuries earlier.

Read Genesis 20:1-18.

Abimelech's statement to Sarah in **verse 16** is very insightful. This heathen man, who didn't know the LORD, nevertheless made a very true statement. He said that Abraham was a **"covering of the eyes"** for Sarah. In other words, Abraham was *supposed* to be protecting his wife from the eyes of other men. Sad to say, Abraham had failed miserably in that responsibility. Out of fear for his own life, he had told a half-truth (which was really just a lie), and had let Abimelech think that Sarah was his sister, and nothing more. He had *let* her be taken into the king's harem (although she had not yet had physical intimacy with him). I don't know whether Abraham had an emergency plan to keep this from actually happening; but even if he did, he had still gravely failed to be a **"covering of the eyes"** to Sarah. In reality, *Abraham* was being reproved here. Now, that statement, **"he is to thee a covering of the eyes"** was directed to Sarah (probably because Abimelech was afraid to rebuke Abraham directly, since Abraham was the prophet of a powerful God). However, this was still an indirect rebuke to *Abraham*, because he was the one who initiated this whole deception.

And yet, the Bible does say that *Sarah* was reproved by Abimelech's statement. Why? Was this deception Sarah's fault, too? Yes! She had a moral responsibility *not* to obey her husband in this instance! Abraham had asked her to do something that was a grievous sin against God; and she should have said, "Abraham. I love you; but I can't disobey God." When Abraham told her to lie, and to put herself into a situation in which her purity would be in serious danger of being compromised, she should have said "No!"—not because she was being *self-willed* or stubborn, but because she was submitting to *God*.

Men, you who are married have a duty to make sure that your wife's dignity and modesty are protected. Don't follow Abraham's poor example at this particular point in his life! Don't be passive: be a protector. This doesn't mean that you should be hyper jealous and suspicious of every man that comes within fifty feet of your wife; but it *does* mean that you should not let your wife walk into a situation in which there is potential spiritual danger. One way you can be a "covering of the eyes" for your wife is to help her to cover *herself* sufficiently. Not everything that is "in fashion" is pleasing to the Lord. Should something she wants to wear stir up *your* passion, why would it not stir up *other* men's passions? Don't be afraid to say, "Honey, I don't think that it would please the Lord if you wear this. It may be o.k. in the bedroom, with me; but not outside this door. This clothing is too low in the wrong places, and too high in other places. Trust me: I'm a man, and I know what I'm talking about." Perhaps you need to be a "covering of the eyes" by not allowing your wife to be in a situation in which she is alone with another man. (I, personally, will not allow myself to be alone with a woman who is not my wife; and my wife holds herself to the same standard with men. It's not because I don't trust my wife, or because she doesn't trust me; it's because *neither of us trusts*

our own sinful nature.) These are just a few ways you can be a “**covering of the eyes**” to your wife; but the most important way is to be the *spiritual leader* in your home. As you read God’s Word with your wife, and pray with her, and keep God at the centre of your home, and banish worldliness from your home, and spend much time talking with her, and developing your relationship with her, and learning her emotional and spiritual needs, and loving and cherishing her, you are putting up a strong “firewall” that will prevent *any* man from stealing her heart. By the way, men, if you are single, make sure you marry a woman who has the *desire* to guard her modesty—and to allow *you* to help her guard her modesty.

Now, let’s get back to Vashti. What kind of woman was she? And what kind of relationship did she have with her husband? We don’t know. There are always two sides to the story in any marital conflict; and usually, there is fault on both sides—even if I be 5% on one side, and 95% on the other. Vashti may have been a very proud and stubborn woman, for all we know. If she had a loud, stubborn, prideful, and haughty spirit as she disobeyed the king, then in this, she was wrong. The Bible says that women are to be in subjection to their husbands, and to obey them with a “**meek and quiet spirit.**” In **1 Peter 3**, the Apostle Peter cited Sarah as an example of a wife who submitted to her husband—even calling him “lord” (with a little “I”).

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Wives, in God’s sight, you and your husband are of equal worth. Yet, you *are* the “**weaker vessel**”; and God has given your husband the responsibility to lead you and protect you. You are to respect him and submit to his authority, just as Sarah submitted herself to Abraham. Yet, if there should ever come a time when your husband asks you to do something that is clearly, undeniably against *Gods’* command, you must obey God. You must humbly, respectfully appeal to your husband to let you do the *right* thing (just as Sarah *should* have done), and pray that God will open his eyes. When the Sanhedrin commanded the Apostles not to speak in Jesus’ name, Peter’s reply was, “**We ought to obey God rather than men.**”

Folks, this is not a simple matter. Sin always complicates things; and it often forces believers into situations in which they must make hard decisions! Saved women with unsaved husbands are often faced with the decision of whether to obey God, or to obey their husband, when he has commanded them to do something ungodly. Wives in non-Christian homes are often ordered by their husbands *not* to read the Bible, or to pray, or to go to church, or to take their children to church. (Or, at least, they are mentally manipulated into thinking that they “don’t love them” if they do these things.) In many countries, Christian women risk being beaten by their husbands, or thrown into the street, or even killed, for doing any Christian activity. Yet, *God* commands us to read His Word, and to pray, and to assemble with God’s people, and to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Whom, then, are these wives to obey? They must obey Christ! Jesus said that to be His disciple, you must take up your

cross daily, and follow Him. Many Christian wives are expected to sit down with their husbands in the sitting room, or in a cinema, and watch a sleezy Hollywood movie, in which God's name is blasphemed, and sin is made to look good, and nudity is occasionally displayed. Whom must the wife obey in such a circumstance? God! She must say, "No, I cannot watch that. My body is God's Temple; and I cannot defile it." Many a husband expects his wife to drink alcohol with him, or at least to go to a place with him where alcohol is consumed. Sometimes the husband expects his wife to go to the temple of a false god (or gods), or into a church where a false gospel, and "another Jesus," is preached. Whom must the wife obey, then? Again, she must obey God! In **Deuteronomy 13:6**, the LORD said to the children of Israel, ***"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods...thou shalt not consent unto him."*** Believers must *not* allow even their closest loved ones (not even a husband or wife) to keep them from obeying God.

By the way, young people, do *not* marry someone who doesn't know the Lord; and do *not* marry a professing Christian who doesn't love the Lord wholeheartedly, and desire to serve Him. The Bible says, ***"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"*** If you think, "Well, I think that he (or she) will get saved after we're married," chances are about 99% that it *won't* happen that way. I've seen more Christians marry non-Christians than I care to remember: and *rarely* have I seen the non-Christian get saved. To the contrary, I've seen Christians get pulled farther and farther into a life of perpetual disobedience to the Lord, until their walk with the Lord is all but dead, and they look just like an unbeliever. (And as for their *children*, they don't even know who the Lord is!) Christian, *always* obey God, no matter what the cost!

II. The verdict of the chamberlains (vv. 13-22)

(Read Esther 1:13-22 again.) Folks, as I said in last week's message, this is a sad and messy story. We shouldn't be surprised by the ungodly things that are reported in this book (or anywhere in the Bible); nor should we look to people's ungodly deeds as a pattern for us to follow, just because someone in a position of authority did them, or sanctioned them. The Bible isn't always "sanitary" and "family friendly," because it reports things the way they really happened. The fact of the matter is that we live in a sinful, fallen world; and sin ruins everything! Righteousness is simple and straightforward; but sin twists that which is pure, and makes it impure, and complicated. Sin causes unavoidable offences; but the fact that offences happen regularly, and are regarded as "no big deal" by most people, doesn't make them right.

Jesus said, ***“Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”***

With that in mind, let’s look at this situation. Ahasuerus was furious at Vashti for disobeying his command. His pride was wounded. And so, he asked his chamberlains for advice; and Memucan spoke up and said, “Your majesty, we can’t allow this to continue. We can’t allow Vashti to get away with this. If we do, women everywhere will despise their husbands. Therefore, you must divorce your wife.” Now, was there any truth in Memucan’s statement? Was Memucan right in saying that women should obey their husbands? Yes, he was right. Even as heathens, they understood the precept that God gave when He said to Eve, ***“Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”*** Women *should* obey their husbands, as God said back in the very the beginning. However, Memucan failed to mention the fact that the king had asked Vashti to do something absolutely disgraceful, which she shouldn’t have been asked to do. And worst of all, the chamberlains concluded that he must therefore divorce Vashti. Was *this* a biblical ground for divorcing his wife? Absolutely not!

Read Matthew 19:3-8.

Read Malachi 2:13-16.

Folks, no matter what Vashti had done, and no matter what kind of snarky attitude she may or may not have had, one thing is certain: divorce was *definitely* not God’s will! It doesn’t matter that Ahasuerus was a heathen who didn’t know God, or the Scriptures: he was still accountable to the law of God, which was written in his heart and conscience. God set the standard in the beginning when He prophesied through the mouth of Adam, ***“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”***

Folks, marriage was meant to be for *life*. God hates divorce, because He knows the hurt and pain that it causes—and because divorce destroys the spiritual picture of the inseparable union between God and His people. Is *separation* necessary in some cases, if there be violence involved? Of course. But does God smile on divorce? No. Even in the case of adultery during the betrothal period (which was the rough equivalent of engagement in our culture), God allowed it only because of the hardness of people’s hearts. God set the standard, in Israel, that adulterers were to be stoned to death; yet, God showed, time and time again, that what He *really* wants to see in a broken marriage is repentance, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration—just as *He* has forgiven His people of all *our* trespasses.

Christian, if you have a divorce in your past, you can't undo it; but you *can* be faithful to the spouse that you have now. Stay faithful till death! If you are single, purpose in your heart that divorce will *never* be an option for you; and marry someone who is just as grounded in that conviction as you are. And by the way, if there be sin in your life that could ever threaten your marriage, fall on your face and ask God to help you remove that thing *now*. Guys, don't give your wife (or your future wife) a reason to consider divorcing you—such as addiction to porn. Cleanse your hands, and purify your heart, if there be any double-mindedness in your life.

III. The verdict of God

Read Proverbs 20:24.

The chamberlains gave their verdict of what King Ahasuerus should do: and their verdict was ungodly. In fact, **Esther chapter 1** is one continuous record of ungodly decisions, and bad behaviour. Even the truest words in this chapter are mingled with evil; and every deed is laced with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, which God hates. Surely God couldn't use the ungodly things that Ahasuerus did to accomplish something *good*, could He? Yes, He could: and He did! As we will see, God used the vacancy in the queen's office to place a *righteous* woman there, so that she could save God's people from a future calamity.

Now, what are we to make of this? Does this make God the author of sin? No, it does not. Now, unfortunately, there are many who *do* make God out to be the author of sin (though they may hesitate to say it outright). Many say that man does not have a "free will"—which would mean that God actually *intends* for people to do wicked things, and decrees for them to do them. This theology claims that God *willed* for Adam to sin in the first place, so that sin would enter the world, and so that He could then elect some of Adam's race to salvation, and others to damnation. Folks, this is *not* God's character. God *never* desires for men to do evil.

Now, as we just read in **Proverbs 20**, men *do* devise their own way (often in defiance of God); yet, their "*goings*" are "*of the LORD*." Does this mean that God *makes* them disobey Him? No, it does not! The reason that men's "*goings*" are "*of the LORD*" (even when their goings are evil) is simply this: God *turns* their wicked plans around, and uses them to accomplish *His* plan, *in spite of* their rebellion. Man *thinks* he "understands" his own way, and that he can control the outcome of his decisions. But he does not. Did Joseph's brothers understand their own way when they sold Joseph into slavery? Of course not. They had the free will, of course, to do the right thing, or to do evil; and those chose evil. However, they couldn't possibly foresee how their plan would actually turn out. Little did they know that God would turn their evil around for good, to save their family through a famine years later—and to reconcile them to their brother, whom they had tried to murder! It wasn't God's will for them

to have murder in their hearts; yet, God *let them* do this evil deed, and then used it for good. The “winds of Providence” blew at just the right time and way to accomplish God’s plan.

Conclusion: In the end, God wins, whether men give Him the glory or not. Yet, the fact that God can take men’s wrong choices, and use them to accomplish something good, doesn’t make our wrong choices O.K.; nor does it mean that we “had no choice.” We *do* have a choice; and God will hold us accountable for our actions. This means that if you are not saved, you can’t blame God for your decision to reject Him. You won’t be able to stand before God some day and say, “I had no choice,” or, “It’s your fault that I rejected you, God, because you *really* turned me off by allowing all the evil in the world.” If God were to wipe out all the evil in the world, He’d have to wipe out *all of us*. We are *all* wicked, Hell-deserving sinners; and that is why God, in His mercy, made a way to save us. If you will repent of your sin, and trust in the sacrifice that Jesus made for you on the cross, He will save you, and give you eternal life.

Perhaps you are saved; but you can’t figure out which fork in the road that you should take. If so, remember what Solomon said. You don’t *really* understand your way; nor do you *need* to understand it. You don’t *need* to know exactly where your path will lead, or what joys, heartaches, or even calamities may lie ahead. You just need to be sure that the way you take is the *right* way, because you are following the Lord by faith, and not by sight. ***“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”***

¹ “Spanish Armada,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Armada#Battle_of_Gravelines

² *Ibid.*

³ “Spanish Armada,” <https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Spanish-Armada/272951>

⁴ Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 649.