

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 30 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.

When God Doesn't Seem Fair

Esther 2:1-8

On 20 June in 1631, the inhabitants of the seaside village of Baltimore, County Cork, woke up to the shock of their lives. The dreaded Barbary Pirates had landed on their shores; and they captured all 237 villagers. A Dutch sea captain named **Murat Reis** (who himself had been captured by the pirates, and forced to convert to Islam) led this raid; but the rest of the pirates were from Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey. The citizens of Baltimore were taken to these faraway lands, where the men were made slaves. Of the men of Baltimore, only two managed to escape and return to Ireland, years later; and as for the women, none ever returned. Tragically, the women were forced into harems, where they became the “wives” of sultans.¹ It is estimated that about one and a quarter million people from coastal towns all over Europe met this fate from the 1600’s to the early 1800’s.² Some areas of the coasts of Italy literally “lost their entire child-bearing population,” as the women were hauled off as though they were cattle.³ In 1704, an eleven-year-old boy named **Thomas Pellow** was abducted from his fishing village in England, and was taken away with 25,000 other slaves to Meknes, Morocco. (He was a slave for the next 20 years, until he was released.) In the palace of **Sultan Moulay Ismail**, Thomas was tortured brutally, until he converted to Islam; and over the next 20 years, he witnessed almost unbelievable brutality, torture, and murder.⁴ He himself got used to the brutality, and took part in it, after he was made a captain in the sultan’s army.⁵ However, perhaps the saddest thing that Thomas witnessed in those years was the Sultan’s abduction of at least 500 foreign women, and their forced marriage to him. (From these unions, the sultan had 1,042 children.)⁶

Now, why have I given you such a sobering piece of history? Because I want you to feel the reality of forced marriages, by relating a story from relatively modern times. The raid of Baltimore happened on the shores of *this* country, not that many centuries ago; and though the women of our country today enjoy protection from such outrages, the sad fact is that in many parts of the world, forced marriages happen to women all the time, with absolutely no protection from government or society. At this very moment, our sisters in Christ in many Muslim countries are living under the constant threat of being abducted and forced into polygamous marriages. (This is one of the many serious matters that we pray about here at Redemption Baptist Church.) Imagine the grief and terror that these women must feel when they are ripped away from their loving homes, and are forced to marry strange men who don’t know our God, and who view them as nothing but property! Imagine if this were to happen to *your* daughter. Then consider that this is *exactly* what happened to a Jewish girl named **Esther**, about 2,500 years ago.

Folks, the account of Esther isn’t some romantic story of a young girl who got to become a queen in a beautiful palace, “once upon a time, in a land far, far away.” It is the *real* story of the abduction of a godly young lady, and of her forced marriage to a king who cared nothing about her God, or her ways, or for her, and who viewed her as a plaything. That is the harsh reality. God allowed this to happen—just as

He *often* allows bad things to happen to His children. Why does God often seem so unfair? That is what we'll be talking about this morning, in this message which I've entitled ***When God Doesn't Seem Fair***.

Read Esther 2:1-8.

I. The foul decree (vv. 1-4)

In last week's message, we saw that Queen Vashti had refused to come to King Ahasuerus' drunken party, because she knew that she would be ogled by hundreds of drunken men. Ahasuerus was furious at Vashti for disobeying his command; and his seven chamberlains advised him to divorce and banish Vashti. Now, after Ahasuerus had sobered up from his drunken party, and had begun to think rationally, he began to regret what he'd done. However, he couldn't reverse his decision. The legal code of the Medes and Persians wouldn't permit *any* law to be revoked once it had been sealed by the king. What was he to do, then? Well, once again, the chamberlains had an idea. They said, "Send into all the provinces, and fetch the most beautiful virgins, and draft them into your harem. Then you can pick the one that is most pleasing to you, and make her the new queen!" Of course, the king loved this carnal idea, and put his signet to the decree. One can only imagine how many families were devastated when the king's servants barged into their homes, and ripped their daughters away from them. Undoubtedly, some of these women were Jews; and one of these Jews was **Esther**.

Now, before we take a closer look at the family background of Esther, I want to pause for a few moments, and talk about the matter of polygamy. To born-again, Bible-believing Christians, it goes without saying that polygamy is wrong. From the very beginning of this church age, God's people have always rejected polygamy; and most Western nations have been influenced by the Bible's teachings on marriage to such an extent, that polygamy has been universally outlawed for many centuries. However, we are now living in a world in which *every* biblical precept about marriage is being turned on its head. You may think it irrelevant to talk about polygamy this morning, since we live in a country where polygamy is illegal; however, I have a news flash: things are changing fast! The most foundational truths about marriage are being undermined. Eleven years ago, Ireland voted, 2 to 1, to make "marriage" between two men, or two women, legal. Fast-forward a decade, and we now hear people pushing for "other durable relationships" (such as polygamy, or "polyamory") to be made legal.⁷ Many people even claim that the Bible approves of polygamy. (After all, Abraham, Jacob, David, and many other godly people had more than one wife, didn't they?) As Christians, we'd better be ready to answer people's questions about these things: and, as always, we need to go back to God's pattern for marriage back ***"in the beginning."*** We will also look at an example of a polygamous family, and see how things worked out for them.

Read Genesis 2:23-24 and 29:25 – 30:20.

Jacob was a sincere believer, who often walked by faith; but he didn't *always* walk by faith: and marriage was one area in which his faith seriously failed. Yes, he was tricked by his uncle into marrying Leah instead of Rachel; but did that make it right for him to take on Rachel as a second wife? Just look at the fruit of his polygamous family, and you'll find your answer. Poor Leah was always trying to get her husband to love her; but he never really did. Instead of trusting God to help him love Leah, Jacob multiplied his wives; and inevitably, there was serious jealousy between these four wives, *and* between their children. Throughout the Bible, we see that polygamy *always* caused major turmoil in homes.

Why did God permit polygamy, then? Because Israel was already a polygamous society long before God gave them the Law on Mount Sinai; and God had never given a law specifically against it. However, *God's people should have known better*. God had set the standard in the Garden of Eden, when He created *one* man and *one* woman, and made them mates for life; and that pattern was, in itself, a law. This pattern of marriage excluded adultery, fornication, polygamy, polyamory, homosexuality, and every other "durable relationship" that deviates from God's pattern. God *grudgingly permitted* polygamy, since it was already well-entrenched in Hebrew society; but he permitted it for the same reason that He permitted divorce (within a very narrow window). God allowed polygamy because of the *hardness of people's hearts*; but, just as Christ said about divorce, "***From the beginning it was not so.***" God's frown was always upon polygamy; and He discouraged it by regulating it. In **Deuteronomy 17:17**, God specifically commanded the kings of Israel *not* to multiply wives. Also, in **Deuteronomy 21**, God said that if a man had two wives, and he loved the one, but hated the other, he was *not* to make the son of the beloved wife the firstborn if that son *wasn't* actually the firstborn; in fact, he was to give a *double* portion to the son of the hated wife.

For hundreds of years, polygamy was rife in Hebrew society; and it caused major problems. However, by the time the Jews returned from Babylon, polygamy seems to have disappeared completely. Not once is a polygamous family mentioned in any of the books of the Bible that were written after the Babylonian captivity (**Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi**). Why? Because the Jews had learned their lesson during their years of chastisement! The rabbis severely restricted polygamy, and eventually forbade it; and the people themselves had no desire to return to it. As for us Christians in this New Testament age, we have always rejected polygamy. Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and having a level of revelation and spiritual understanding that Old Testament believers never had, we can clearly see that polygamy is against God's will. In **1 Timothy 3**, God commanded bishops to be the husband of *one* wife; and He holds *all* believers to this standard.

With this in mind, let's get back to the story of Esther. Godly Jews knew, by this time, what God's mind was about polygamy. Yet, as we saw in **verse 8**, God allowed Esther to become a wife in a pagan king's harem, in which there were *hundreds* of wives. Why? We'll answer that question soon. But first, let's examine the character of Esther and her cousin Mordecai.

II. The faithful step-father (vv. 5-7)

(Read Esther 2:5-7 again.) At this point in the book of **Esther**, the author is finally introducing us to the two heroes of this story—*God's* heroes. The first hero was a man named **Mordecai**. We are also introduced to Mordecai's young cousin, **Esther**. By the way, may I pause, at this point, and emphasise that Mordecai and Esther are not “Bible characters”? (I refuse to use the phrase “Bible characters!”) These weren't “characters”: they were real people! Modernist scholars claim that the story of **Esther** was a fanciful work of fiction, and that it was written long after the Persian Empire had fallen, and the Greeks were in power. However, there is something curious about this claim. If **Esther** *were* written during the time of the Greek Empire, then there should have been many Greek words that had worked their way into the Hebrew language, and appeared in the text. In fact, it would have been inevitable! Yet, there is not *one* Greek word in the entire book of **Esther**.⁸ All the non-Hebrew words in **Esther** are either *Babylonian* words, or *Persian* words (which we would expect, since the Jews had been under Babylonian and Persian rule for a century). As for the Persian words in **Esther**, many of them fell out of use *after* the time of King Darius and Xerxes.⁹ This shows that the Persian words in **Esther** are from the very time period when the Bible says that these events happened. How could someone living hundreds of years *after* the time of Darius have known the Persian words that were unique to his day? He couldn't!

Folks, I say all this to drive home the point that Esther and Mordecai were *real people*; and records outside the Bible affirm it. The name “Esther” hasn't been found in extrabiblical records *yet* (at least, not that the public has been told); but we know that the name “Mordecai” *has* been found! The name “Mordecai” means “**worshipper of Marduk**”; and Marduk was one of the most important gods of Babylon. This shows that Mordecai was brought up in Babylon, just as the Bible says. Mordecai's father, Jair, was evidently a godly man, who passed on the faith of the true God to his children; and he certainly would not have named his son after a pagan God. Mordecai was a name that was given to him by a Babylonian master, after he and his family were taken away as captives to Babylon in 597 B.C.

So, what kind of man was Mordecai? For one thing, he was a hard-working, diligent man; and we know this not just from the Bible, but from ancient Persian records. You see, Mordecai's name is mentioned very favourably in Persian inscriptions from the 5th century B.C., during the reign of Darius.¹⁰ His name appears 13 times as “Marduka” in clay tablets from the ruins of Shushan.¹¹ In the tablets, Marduka is said to have been a “*siper*, or financial administration officer,” who worked for a satrap (a provincial governor) named Ushtannu.¹² All kinds of financial transactions are mentioned, such as “5 shekels of silver” that had come into Mordecai's office from somewhere in Shushan.¹³ In later tablets, it is said that he moved up the ranks, to a much higher position. He was placed over the distribution of food for the

king's craftsmen and workers. He supplied sheep, grain, wine, flour, sheepskins, cowhides, and bread, and set the rates for the workers' pay.¹⁴ This confirms what the Bible says—that Mordecai ***“sat in the king's gate.”*** Rulers, judges, and officers in the ancient Middle East sat in the gates of cities, or in the gates of kings' palaces, if they worked directly for the king. *Mordecai* sat in the king's gate; so he was obviously a highly trusted officer. Even though he was pushing 90 years of age, he was still working hard; and God honoured him for it.

Read Proverbs 22:29.

What is Solomon saying here? Is he saying that every believer who works hard will end up getting a high-paying or high-ranking job, and pal around with kings and VIP's? Obviously not. It *is* a biblical principle, though, that when you place your trust in the Lord, and put Him first, and work hard, *for the right motivation* (to serve the King of Kings), God will supply your needs. He may not give you great abundance (in fact, Christ guarantees us that in this world, we *will* suffer some level of persecution for His name's sake); yet, He does promise to provide our daily bread. Sometimes, God even gives believers the privilege of standing before powerful people, or of coming into some wealth, because He knows that that believer will use his wealth to serve Him, and point others to Him. You see, for the believer, there is no real difference between “secular” business, and the Lord's business. For the believer, *all honest work* is sacred, because work is one of the means by which we serve the Lord.

Read Romans 12:10-11.

Look closely at what Paul is saying here. First, he says that believers should not be ***“slothful in business.”*** The word ***“business”*** comes from the word *speudo*, from which we get our word “speed.” Believers shouldn't drag their feet as they work, but should be quick and instant in carrying out their duties. Believers should also work with a ***“fervent”*** spirit. The word ***“fervent”*** literally has the idea of being hot, boiling over, or glowing. And *why* should believers have a fervent spirit? Because they are working for the purpose of *serving the Lord*. The question isn't merely, “Are you working hard?” The question is, “Whom are you working *for*?” Are you working to acquire money and stuff for *yourself*, so that *you* can treat *yourself* to a cushy life? Or are you working to serve the King of Kings? Mordecai worked for an earthly king, whom he later had the privilege of serving as right-hand-man; yet, he considered his service to the King of Heaven to be far more important than any earthly honour or position. Christian, is this *your* desire—to serve the Lord fervently and faithfully?

Now, what do we know about Mordecai's family? First, we know that he was from the tribe of Benjamin. His great-grandfather's name was **Kish**—which might mean that he was a descendant of King Saul, whose father's name was Kish. Names of important ancestors were often repeated many times in a family line; and this may have been the case with Mordecai's

family. (For what it's worth, the ancient historian Josephus said that Mordecai *was*, in fact, a descendant of King Saul. Remember that! It will become important later in this book!) However, the most important thing we know about Mordecai is that he was a godly father. We don't know if he had any children of his own; but he was a *step*-father to his cousin Esther, whose parents had died. Esther's father was probably one of the youngest children in a large family; and he himself probably married late in life, and had Esther later in his life. This made for a huge age gap between Mordecai and Esther, even though they were first cousins. Mordecai was old; yet he didn't consider little Esther to be an inconvenience. He obviously poured himself into her.

Men, imagine if you were to become an adopted father between ages 65 and 70! This was a huge responsibility for Mordecai; but he took it very seriously: and Esther's godly character was the product. Esther's Hebrew name was **Hadassah**, which means "**myrtle tree**"; but her Persian name was **Esther**, which means "**star**." What a fitting name for a woman who is now shining like the stars of the morning, because she loved and served the Lord! Fathers (and mothers), make your home a sanctuary of praise to God! Speak of Him to your children all day long, and weave God's Word into your conversations. Fill the walls of your home with prayer, Scripture reading, and singing. Show your children, by your example, that there is *nothing* more important than living a holy life of service to God! Show your children how to be saved, and lead them to a saving knowledge of Christ; then equip them to serve the Lord with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength!

Read Ephesians 6:1-4.

III. The forced marriage (v. 8)

(Read Esther 2:8 again.) What did we just read in this verse? We just read about the day when Esther and Mordecai's lives were turned upside-down! Can you imagine the mental anguish that Esther must have experienced when she was dragged off to a pagan harem? Yes, she would be treated well in the palace; but that doesn't change the fact that she was being abducted, against her will, and taken from her adopted father, whom she loved dearly. God was allowing Ahasuerus to follow his own sensual, selfish desires, and make havoc of people's lives. Yet, God didn't *make* Ahasuerus do this evil deed. In fact, you may be sure that *Satan* was behind this. Satan is *always* out to kill, steal, and destroy; and he undoubtedly intended, among other things, to abduct as many Jewish young women as possible, so that he could separate them from any godly influence in their lives, and crush their faith in Jehovah. It may even be that Satan moved Ahasuerus to do this evil thing *specifically* to destroy Esther's faith. Satan is *always* roaming to and fro in the earth like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; and just as he went to God for permission to attack Job, it may be that

there was a court date in the heavens when Satan specifically mentioned Esther and Mordecai by name!

Read Job 1:6-12.

Christian, you may be sure that Satan and his demons know *your* name and address, and that they have a large “profile” on you! They aren’t omniscient; but they are incredibly intelligent: and they keep a sharp eye on *anyone* who knows the Lord. Satan would kill you, if God would allow it; but if he can’t kill you, he wants to destroy your faith, or entice you to sin grievously, so that your testimony will be ruined. Don’t let him do it! ***“Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”***

Folks, God is not the author of evil; but He does allow evil to happen, so that He can turn it around for His own purpose. However, *we* can’t see down the road, and perceive what God is doing; and when hardship or calamity strikes, it seems, from *our* perspective, that God has shattered our hopes and dreams. Take **Ezekiel** for example. He was in the prime of his life when he was taken away as a captive to Babylon. He was from a priestly family—which means that he had been prepared for the priesthood for his entire life up to that point. Studying for the priesthood was a huge deal! The priests had to know all 613 laws of the Torah intimately, and have all five books of the Torah memorised. (That’s almost 80,000 words!) Many priests and rabbis memorised literally *every book of the Old Testament canon*. They had to perform all the duties of the Temple expertly, and quickly. They had to be expert butchers, so that they could prepare the five kinds of sacrifices exactly as specified. (During the three main feasts of the year, they had to prepare up to a quarter of a million sacrifices within hours!) They had to be experts in culinary arts, so that they could cook meat, and prepare unleavened bread, according to exact specifications. They had to be experts in apothecary arts (concocting special incense, lamp oil, and anointing oil). They had to be highly trained in matters of health and hygiene. They had to be able to detect signs of leprosy in people, and in the walls of houses, and personally inspect and quarantine people. They had to know countless civil laws, and be able to teach God’s Law to people. They also had to act as judges, to *enforce* God’s law. They had to do be financial administrators of the millions of shekels that came into the Temple treasury. They had to collect offerings, estimate the worth of properties, count monies, designate funds to proper accounts, and distribute offerings to the priests and Levites. They had to look after the maintenance of the Temple, and make sure that repairs were made. They also had to be trained musicians, to lead the music in the Temple.¹⁵ The priests had to know *all* this stuff! *Ezekiel* had to know all this stuff! All his life he had trained for this holy and noble calling. But then, in a moment, he was taken away captive to Babylon! Why? Surely Ezekiel could have been a godly influence in his homeland, to stem the tide of corruption that had crept into the priesthood, and turn the people back to the LORD. Why, then, was God allowing him to be carried off as a slave to a foreign land?

The answer is: **God wanted Ezekiel to preach to the Jewish captives in Babylon**, to turn their hearts back to Him. Yet, even *this* life's work was nothing like what he would have signed up for. God took away Ezekiel's ability to speak for 7 ½ years, and commanded him to do little "pantomime" plays, and use little figurines and toys to teach God's message to the people. (It was only in the privacy of his home, in the presence of the Jewish elders, that God loosened Ezekiel's tongue temporarily, so that he could explain the meaning of his plays.) At one point, God made Ezekiel lie on his side, with ropes tied around him, for a good portion of every day, for a total of 430 days, just to illustrate the fact that Israel and Judah would be captives to foreign powers for 430 years. During those 430 days, Ezekiel had to eat food that was cooked over a fire fuelled by cow dung, to show that Israel would be ceremonially defiled while they were in captivity. But worst of all, God caused Ezekiel's wife to die of a stroke!

Read Ezekiel 24:15-27.

What just happened here? What happened is that God informed Ezekiel, on the morning of his wife's death, that she would die that day; and he commanded him not to cry outwardly for her, nor to go through the usual mourning customs. Why? To show the children of Judah that the Temple (which was the delight of *their* eyes) would soon be destroyed; and when it *was* destroyed, they were not to grieve about it, because it was the righteous judgment of God. That was it! God allowed Ezekiel's wife to die, just to teach the Jews that lesson.

Folks, these are just a few of the many hard things God has commanded His servants to do. **Abraham** was commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac (which God stopped from happening only at the last minute). God commanded **Hosea** to marry a woman who he knew would cheat on him, and run away, and who would end up in bed with a really nasty guy, who would sell her into slavery. Then, God commanded Hosea to *buy her back*. Why? Because God wanted to illustrate to Israel how *they had grieved Him* by their idolatry and wickedness: yet, He still loves them, and will one day *buy them back* from the slavery of their sin, when they finally repent. **Jeremiah** was commanded not to marry; and during his ministry, the kings of Judah batted him around, just as a cat bats a mouse around before eating it. Jeremiah was arrested, and released, arrested, and released. Then he was put up to his chin in muck, for many days. He constantly heard plots of people conspiring to kill him. Finally, he was so exasperated, that he said, ***"I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name."***

These are just a few people whose life's dreams were shattered by God. And so it was with Esther. In the prime of her life, when she undoubtedly dreamed of getting married to a wonderful man, she was dragged off to a pagan harem. She was forced to be married to a man who *might* spend time with her a few times per year, at best, and who would share his love (or,

rather, his lust) with hundreds of other women. Not only that, but Esther surely realised that eventually, when she grew old, she would be replaced, and shoved away into virtual widowhood. (How worthless would that make you feel?) Esther couldn't understand what God was doing. She couldn't see through the shadows, and realise that God would use her to save her nation. All she could see was darkness. It seemed that God wasn't even around. Yet, God *was* there; and He was *not* being unjust, or unfair. He was exercising His perfect wisdom, to accomplish a plan that no one could yet understand; and He was using *her* to accomplish it.

Some of *you* may have your dreams shattered, too. God may require you to go through a trial that seems impossible to bear. What will give you the courage to stay fervent in spirit, always serving the Lord, during those dark times? **The Word of God!** Remember how Jeremiah said that he was “done,” and that he wouldn't talk to anyone about the Lord anymore? What gave him the fortitude to open his mouth again, and keep serving the Lord? **The Word of God!** Jeremiah said, ***“But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.”*** So it was with Esther. God's Word had been her food day after day, year after year; and when all her dreams were shattered, she was ready to say, ***“Not my will, but thine,”*** and do whatever God required of her.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask of you, Christian: Are *you* willing to be broken? Are *you* willing to do whatever God requires? Are you willing to take up the cross of death to self? Will you, like Job, say, ***“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold”***? Perhaps you have never truly believed on Christ; and all this talk about suffering, and taking up the cross, it making you think, “Whoa! I don't want to be a Christian if *that's* what's in store for me!” If so, please realise that even though the Christian life is filled with trials, it is also filled with ***“joy unspeakable.”*** There is nothing like knowing that you *belong to the King*, and that one day you will spend eternity with Him in the glory of Heaven. If you've never been saved, please trust in Him as Saviour today!

¹ “Sack of Baltimore,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sack_of_Baltimore

² William Federer, *There Really Is a Santa Claus* (St. Louis, MO: Amisearch, Inc., 2002), p. 95.

³ *Ibid*, p. 95.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 97, 99.

⁵ “Thomas Pellow,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Pellow

⁶ Federer, *There Really Is a Santa Claus*, p.97.

⁷ RoI ‘opening door to polygamy with latest attempt to devalue marriage,’ The Christian Institute, 26 January 2024, <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/roi-opening-door-to-polygamy-with-latest-attempt-to-devalue-marriage/>

⁸ Bill Cooper, *The Authenticity of the Book of Esther* (United Kingdom: Creation Science Movement, 2016), p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 32.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵ John Schmidt and Carl Laney, *Messiah's Coming Temple* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), pp. 45-46.