

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 6 September 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 Power of Obedience and Contentment

Esther 2:9-20

During my freshman year in Bible college, I had a health and first-aid instructor named **John** for one of my missions courses; and one day during class, John told us a story from his teen years. A group of teens from his church youth group had gone on a missions trip to a Central American country, to visit a missionary family; and John was one of the group. Their youth pastor was praying that through their interaction with the missionary, the teens would go home with a greater burden for the Great Commission. At least, that's the way it was *supposed* to be. However, most of the teens weren't catching the burden. During their visit, most of the teens complained about the lack of material comforts. They grumbled about the food, the bugs, the heat, and the lack of air conditioning; but the thing they grumbled about the most was the lack of a hot shower. If they wanted to get cleaned up, the guys and girls had to split up, go to two distant bends of the river, and take a dip (while maintaining their modesty, of course). However, John was determined not to complain. He went down to the river, bit his lip, and jumped into that cold, muddy water without muttering a word of discontent. He also did whatever the missionary asked of him immediately, and with a good attitude. Well, unbeknown to John, the missionary had been watching him closely; and he really appreciated his good attitude. Finally, the missionary quietly approached John, and told him that he could use his family's shower, which was powered by a generator. It wasn't fancy, and it didn't have a big tank; but it did provide him with *clean, hot* water!

Now, why did John have such a good attitude, and helpful spirit? Was it because the missionary had hinted that there might be a hot shower in store for those who had a good attitude? Was John being a goody-two-shoes just to get in good with the missionary? No. John wasn't expecting to be rewarded in any way. He just wanted to be a servant; and in time, his Christ-like spirit was rewarded.

Contentment and thankfulness are spiritual qualities that *should* be manifesting more and more every day, in the life of every child of God. Not only should we serve our Master with implicit obedience; but we should ***“serve the LORD with gladness,”*** and ***“come before his presence with singing.”*** No matter what situation we may find ourselves in, we should know both how to be abased, and how to abound, with an attitude of gratitude. This is the kind of spirit that a believer named **Esther** had long ago; and because of her excellent spirit, she not only was exalted, but she was placed in a position in which she would one day be used of God in a way that she never could have imagined. This was God's will for Esther; and it is God's will for you, too. The title of this message is ***The Power of Obedience and Contentment***.

Read Esther 2:9-20.

I. The special favour of Heggai (v. 9)

At the end of last week's message, we found that Esther had been taken away, against her will, to the palace of King Ahasuerus. This must have been the darkest and most fearful day in her life. She was now living in a virtual prison (albeit an extremely luxurious one). Her days would be spent almost entirely within the walls of this palace, and in the company of hundreds of other wives; and there was probably a constant undercurrent of envy, maliciousness, and spitefulness among them. The only men with whom Esther had contact were the eunuchs, whose sole job was to supply her with luxurious food and garments, and constant beauty treatments. However, every time she was lathered with sweet-smelling myrrh and other spices, she was reminded that her entire existence was now about prepping for the *one night* she would spend with the king: and she knew that it may very well be the *only* time she would ever spend with him. Yet, through it all, Esther remained cheerful. How do I know this? Because the Bible says that ***“the maiden pleased”*** Heggai, the keeper of the women; and he showed her ***“favour.”*** Her outward beauty wasn't what caused Heggai and the other servants to like her: it was her *sweet spirit* that drew them to her. It wasn't long before Heggai gave Esther seven personal maids. He also put her in an exalted place in the house of the women. Esther wasn't being a “goody-two-shoes” so that Heggai would favour her; she was simply being godly: and people were attracted to the light of God's presence in her life.

Throughout the Bible, we are told that God gives ***“favour”*** to His children when they love and obey Him. Not only do obedient believers have favour with God: they oftentimes find favour with men, as well. Christ Himself is the ultimate example. Scripture says that as Christ was growing up, He grew in ***“wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”*** In **Proverbs 3:1-4**, Solomon told his son that if he would not forget his commandments, and if he would bind mercy and truth about his neck, and write them on the table of his heart, then he would find ***“favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.”*** Even in this wicked world, which is under the sway of Satan, sinners are still attracted to a person who has a godly spirit. Christian, when you let Christ rule in your heart, you are like a lamp shining in a very dark place. In a pitch-black cave, everyone can see the light of a single candle: and so it is with someone who loves and fears God. *Some* people, at least, will be happy to see the light of God's holiness in your life (even if they are afraid to admit it).

Now, there is something you need to realise about favour with men: it is fickle! People rejoiced in John the Baptist's brilliant light; but only for a ***“season.”*** If favour in the eyes of men is what you are seeking after, then you will *compromise* in order to get that favour.

Read Proverbs 31:30.

In this verse, Solomon says something very interesting. He says that ***“Favour is deceitful.”*** Now, on the surface, this seems to conflict with the verses in **Proverbs** that speak of “favour

with men” as a *good* thing. Favour with men *can* be a good thing; but when is favour with men “deceitful”? *When it has been gotten in the wrong way, and for the wrong reason.*

Christian, remember this! And *young ladies*, remember this! No matter how hard you may try to be beautiful, someday your beauty will fade—and so will the appreciation of those who valued you only for your physical beauty. However, *if you fear the LORD*, then those who appreciate virtue and godliness will continue to honour you, even when your physical beauty fades. As you wait for a husband, don’t *ever* compromise your purity. Do *not* dress with the world’s provocative dress, or act like the world, or talk like the world! Dress, talk, and conduct yourself as a daughter of the King! Make sure that your future husband is attracted to you for the *right* reason. If you love the Lord with all your heart, you most likely will not attract a man who values you only for your physical beauty. (You’ll be too “religious” for him. He won’t consider you to be worth it.) And even if you do attract such a man, he won’t be able to get anywhere with you, because you have resolved to wait for a man who loves the Lord, just as you do. (By the way, when you’re walking in the Spirit, you can detect someone who is phony—even if he outwardly *appear* to be serving the Lord.) Ladies, mark it down: a man who values only physical beauty will break your heart when you aren’t “good enough” for him anymore. However, a man who loves God will cherish you all your days.

II. The secret obedience of Esther (vv. 10-11, 20)

(Read Esther 10-11 and 20 again.) When Esther went off to the palace, there was something that neither Heggai, nor his servants, nor anyone else in the palace, knew about Esther: namely, that Esther was a Jew. Her Uncle Mordecai had commanded her not to reveal her Jewish ethnicity to anyone. Now, why did Mordecai give Esther this instruction? Was He ashamed of the God of Israel? No. God obviously was the centre of his life. Yet, Mordecai knew that many Persians hated and envied the Jews (just as people worldwide still hate and envy the Jews to this day). And so, for Esther’s safety, he knew that it would be wise to conceal her ethnicity—at least, for a while. It wasn’t human fear that led Mordecai to give Esther this command: it was the *Spirit of God* who was moving him to do so.

Now, this wasn’t going to be an easy command to keep. Hiding one’s Jewishness is not easy. For example, Esther, as a God-fearing Jew, could *not* eat unkosher meats; yet, Heggai was undoubtedly commissioned *to give Esther* unkosher meats to eat. Did she compromise on this? We may be sure that she didn’t. Yet, this would have been hard to do. When Daniel was given non-kosher food in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, he asked Melzar to give him a ten-day trial of nothing but vegetables; and he fearlessly told Melzar that he couldn’t eat the meat because he was a Jew. However, Esther couldn’t give this explanation, because she was under orders from her dad *not to reveal* that she was a Jew. She had to hide her Jewishness without

actually lying. She had to be very wise and cautious in her words. Yet, she obeyed. To her, Mordecai wasn't her cousin; he was her *dad*: and she was determined to obey him.

Now, think about this. Esther was a grown woman: yet, she continued to obey God *and* obey her father, even though it was difficult to balance their commands. It would have been easy enough for Esther to hide her Jewishness by *forgetting* God's laws, and acting just like any other worldling; but she didn't. This required character; and her character didn't develop overnight, or in a vacuum. A godly dad had been training her in the ways of the LORD since her earliest childhood; and at some point in her life, when she personally placed her trust in the Lord, her father's God had become *her* God. Her dad was not around to enforce his command, or God's commands; yet, she obeyed God *and* her dad, simply because it was *right*.

This is the way obedience should always be. Children should obey their parents simply because it is *right*. **Ephesians 6:1** says, "***Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.***" The word "***this***" refers back to the word *obey*. *Obedience* is right. Paul didn't say, "Children obey your parents, because your parents' *rules* are right." No, he says, "Children obey your parents, because *obedience* is right." Children are obligated to obey their parents not because they deem their parents' *rules* to be right, or reasonable: they are obligated to obey because *obedience* is right. And *why* is obedience right? Because *God* said so.

Now, this concept is foreign to the world. Parents, in case you haven't noticed, the world is telling your child that it is O.K. to disobey you. On the telly, on the smartphone, and in the classroom, the world is trying to sink its filthy talons into your children, and tell them that it's cool to rebel. This should come as no surprise, since disobedience to parents is one of the top qualities that Paul said would characterise people in the last days. In **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, the sin of "***disobedience to parents***" is listed right alongside many other serious sins in the last days. By the way, the word "***unthankful***" is in this list, as well: and, it is listed right *after* the phrase "***disobedient to parents***." Is there a reason why "***disobedient to parents***" and "***unthankful***" are mentioned back-to-back? I believe so. You see, disobedience to parents, and unthankfulness, go hand-in-hand. For example, when you're in a store, and you see a screaming kid demanding that his dad or mum buy him something, what is that child doing? He's disobeying. He is refusing to take his parent's "no" for an answer. And what usually happens next? Usually, the parent caves in to the child's demands, and puts that thing in the trolley, so that the kid will stop screaming. Then, after the child gets the thing that he wanted, does he *thank* dad or mum for giving him that thing? Not on your life! Why not? Because his parents have not taught him to obey; and in not teaching him to obey, they have taught him to disrespect them. Will a child who despises his parents have any sense of *thankfulness* to them? No, he won't; and tragically, that child's attitude toward his parents is the kind of attitude he will have toward *God*, as well. If children have no sense of obligation to obey their *parents*, or to thank them, they will have no sense of obligation to obey or thank *God*, either.

Now, any parent knows that teaching your children to obey is much easier said than done. That little “bundle of joy” has a strong little will! How do we teach them to obey, then? As always, we must go to God’s Word for the answers. God says that disobedience must be met with discipline. The Bible says, “*He that loveth*” his son “*chasteneth him betimes.*” Just as God, in love, chastises His children, parents who truly love their children must teach their children that there are consequences for disobedience. By the way, the word “*betimes*” means “early.” Correction needs to begin **early in life**. How early? From the time that a child clearly understands what mommy and daddy are telling him not to do, yet he does it anyway. Correction should also be dealt **justly**. Make sure that you know all the facts before you discipline. Do not administer discipline if you are not absolutely sure that a wrong has been done. Make sure that you correct *only* when disobedience or rebellion has clearly taken place. Make sure your children know what the rules are, and exactly what to expect if they disobey. God is a God of justice; and as parents, *we* need to be just, too.

How else should correction be dealt? **With consistency.** This is extremely important! If you correct your child’s disobedience sometimes, yet let it slip at other times, you will cause your child to be confused and frustrated; and this frustration will lead to *resentment and anger* against you. Make sure your child knows that he may *not* get away with disobedience, even once; and deal with his disobedience *as soon as possible* after the offence.

Read Ecclesiastes 8:11.

Many parents deal with their disobedient children by **giving them something** in order to pacify them. The childcare “experts” refer to this as “giving your children options.” But really, it’s nothing but bribery! And what does God have to say about bribery? Nothing good! **Proverbs 17:8** says that a “*gift*” (in other words, a “bribe”) is a precious stone *in the eyes of the one who receives it*, because he can make it to turn and prosper any way he wishes. Now, apply that to the parent-child relationship. When a parent “gives his child options” to encourage good behaviour, who is really in control? The *child* is in control! He knows that he can manipulate his parents. Giving your child whatever he wants in order to encourage good behaviour won’t teach him to love you; it will teach him to despise you, and *use* you!

Another popular method of child-rearing these days is “talking” and reasoning with your child (“gentle parenting”). More times than I can remember, I have seen parents “reasoning” sweetly with their child; but the child knows very well that he can continue to do whatever he wants to do, because Daddy and Mommy aren’t going to do anything to stop him. Now, it is very important to talk with your child as you discipline him, and to show him his wrongdoing from God’s Word. However, for a young child, words alone will not do it. Children must be made to understand that stepping outside God’s boundaries brings consequences in life.

Parents, God is serious about your teaching your children to honour and obey you. Are *you* serious about it? If you are an adult, are you still honouring *your* parents with your words and attitude, and taking their counsel seriously? Esther obeyed her father, even as an adult; and, as we will see later, her obedience later saved her life—and the lives of millions of others! I believe we *all* need to be more like Mordecai *and* Esther! The Bible says, “***My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother.***”

III. The satisfaction of Esther (vv. 12-16)

(Read Esther 2:12-16 again.) For twelve months, the new wives in Ahasuerus’ harem were beautified and trained for one purpose—to have intimate relations with the king, and satisfy his lust. The saddest part was that after that one night, they were moved on to the “***house of women***” (the house for the concubines). They would live out the rest of their days in this house; and most of them would probably never see the king again (unless the king happened to remember their name, and call for them). Could this situation have engendered bitterness in Esther? It certainly could have! Yet, she did not allow this to happen. **Ephesians 4:30-31** says, “***Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.***” **Hebrews 12:14-15** says, “***Follow peace with all men [not just the ones who haven’t wronged you], and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.***” A bitter person infects everyone around him, and spreads misery. A complainer will drain the life out of you! But a joyful, contented spirit lifts everyone’s spirit, and lightens loads.

Now, what is the root of contentment? Where does it come from? Let’s see what Paul said.

Read Hebrews 13:5.

It’s easy to read quickly over this verse, and miss the connection between the first and second half of the verse. The first part of the verse warns against **covetousness**; and the second part assures us of **God’s abiding presence** in believers’ lives. But how do those two ideas relate? It’s simple! You see, the covetous desire for *things* is evidence of a deeper problem—*anxiety*; and anxiety is the result of *lack of faith in God*. In contrast, *faith* in God produces contentment—because you are resting in *His* provision. Jesus said, “***And take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.***” Christian, when you stop trusting God, your eyes will turn to things of this world instead; and they will never satisfy. The cure to covetousness (*and* to anxiety) is *trust in the Father’s care*. You don’t need to cough up €400 for a consultation with

a psychiatrist; you simply need to trust in your heavenly Father. He will give you His peace, free of charge; and He will never leave you, or let you down!

By the way, the word that is translated as "*never*" here in **Hebrews 13:5** is the Greek phrase "*ou me*." In Greek, this is a double negative. It's literally like saying "not, not" in English. This same expression "not, not" is used in **John 6:37**, where Jesus said, "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise* (literally, "not, not") *cast out.*" The same Jesus who promised never to cast you out of your position in salvation is the same Jesus who promises to be with you every moment of the day, and to meet your every need. So trust Him: and let Him fill your heart with contentment!

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11.

Christian, what is your attitude like? What is the aroma of your heart? Does it stink? Or is like a sweet-smelling sacrifice, well-pleasing to God?

IV. The royal status of Esther (vv. 17-19)

(Read Esther 2:17-19 again.) After a year of beautification, the time finally arrived for Esther to spend the night with the king; and, to her amazement, he chose her to be his queen! At this point, Esther must have begun to realise that her being in the king's harem was no accident. What was the likelihood that of the hundreds of women who had been abducted for no reason other than their beauty, *she* was chosen to be queen? Clearly, God's fingerprints were all over this appointment; and only time would tell what God's ultimate purpose was.

However, being at the right place, and at the right time, to accomplish God's will, doesn't just "happen." Golden opportunities to do great things for the Lord don't just fall into believers' laps, regardless of how they've been living their lives. In order to be at the right place, and at the right time, to accomplish a task for the Lord, you must be *walking with the Lord*. If Esther hadn't allowed the Lord to mould her character through the years, she wouldn't have even *been chosen* to be queen. Yes, God did put it in King Ahasuerus' heart to make Esther his queen: however, Ahasuerus was not a robot, or a puppet. God didn't put him in a trance. *His* will was involved, as well. Ahasuerus was *genuinely drawn* to Esther; and the thing that drew him to her was the same thing that drew *everyone* to her. It was her **spirit of contentment**. Young ladies, real beauty is not in earrings, or necklaces, or other jewellery: it is in a meek and quiet spirit. This means that a truly beautiful girl has self-control, and is calm and peaceable. Real beauty is in loving and serving God and others, and being humble. It *will* make you stand out! And guys, this is the kind of beauty for you to look for in a wife someday. Don't

go by outward looks! Many women are outwardly pretty, but inwardly rotten. As you pray for a wife, and look around, seek for a Christian woman with a meek and quiet spirit!

Read 1 Peter 3:1-4.

Folks, a **godly spirit of contentment** is beautiful to all who behold it. Even lost people can't help but admire it. At this point, Esther had been at the palace in Shushan for a whole year, along with many other young women, going through many purification and beauty treatments; and whenever each young lady's turn came up, she could ask for whatever items she desired. Undoubtedly, all the other women had taken full advantage of this "blank cheque." Imagine telling a woman, "You may have whatever jewellery and beauty treatments you want. Cost is no object: the sky's the limit." How many women would be modest, and say, "No, I'll only take the bare minimum. You can give me whatever *you* think is best"? Not many! If the other women in the harem *weren't* spoiled before they came into the palace, you may be sure that they *got* spoiled rotten—very quickly! With all the luxuries that were being thrown at them, their vanity must have been inflating by the day. **But not so with Esther.** Esther took the minimal amount of provisions, and asked for nothing more.

By the way, I find it interesting that Esther "***obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.***" There were plenty of beauties in the harem; but Esther's *outward* beauty was enhanced even more by her *inward* beauty. Jesus said that "***the light of the body is the eye***"; and since *Esther's* eye was singly focused on the Lord, her whole body was "***full of light.***" The holy character that was stamped on Esther's face, and in her eyes, shone with a beauty that couldn't be matched by any physical beauty.

Read Matthew 6:22-23.

Esther's godly contentment brought her favour not only with God, but also with men. She had the "***ornament of a meek and quiet spirit***"; and this spiritual ornament gained her favour with those around her. Because of her meek and quiet spirit, she was made the **queen of Persia**; and because she was put into that position, she was able to save her nation.

So, what's the "takeaway" from all this? Is the takeaway that if you obey God and the authorities in your life, and are content with the things that you have, you will eventually be rich and famous? Not at all! It may be just the opposite. Years ago, a missionary couple named **Tom and Mabel Willey** went to the village of El Valle, Panama, to spread the Gospel; and one day, while her husband was out ministering to people, Mabel was overcome with emotion. Here she was, living in a mud hut, with a thatched roof. She was stuck at home all the time; she couldn't communicate with anyone outside her family; and every day, she had to remove dangerous insects from her children's bodies with kerosine. She cried out to God and

said, “Lord, all I ever wanted was a beautiful home. Is *this* my beautiful home? This mud hut with a thatched roof and creatures falling from the ceiling? And what about my children? Can I bear this for them?”¹ But then, as she was crying and praying, the Lord spoke to her, in the silence of her heart, and said, “Can you not live in this mud hut for *me*? Remember what I have done for you.” This touched Mabel’s heart; and she said, “Yes, Lord... I can live in this mud hut for you. I give my desire for a beautiful home, my children, my husband—all of us—to you. Do with me what you will.”² Because she was willing to be content, God used Mabel and her husband to reach people to the Lord who otherwise would never have been saved.

Conclusion: Brethren, we, as New Testament Christians, are commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature. However, if we are going to reach the lost for Christ, *our* hearts must be filled with His joy. When your heart is filled with joy and gratitude, people can be “**won**” to Him. The Bible says, “***He that winneth souls is wise.***” You can’t force or coax people to get saved: you must *win* them. As people see that beautiful, Christ-like spirit in you, sooner or later, they’ll be curious to know what the *source* of that beauty is; and *that* is when you may have the opportunity to lead that soul to Christ! **Perhaps you have never been saved.** If so, what are you waiting for? Whether it be in a palace or a hut, God wants to use your life for His glory, as His ambassador. But you must humble yourself, admit that you are lost, and receive His gift of salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today, and you will be saved!

¹ Robert Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 823, cited from Mabel Bailey with Mary Ruth Wischart, *Beyond the Gate* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 1998), pp. 64-66.

² *Ibid.*