Intro: Esther is unique in that it uses no religious language. The name of God is never used, and there are no references to worship or prayer. The author, who is anonymous, used this as a literary device to emphasize the presence and providence of God in all places even among those who do not believe.

            You will find wide-ranging interpretations of this book. Many Jewish traditions grew up around it. Some commentators, seeing the clear literary devices in the book, have assumed that the book is allegorical in nature. They suggest that mankind is king Xerxes, that the queen is God’s rule over him, etc. This approach can eventuate in almost any lesson the interpreter wants to tell.

            We will approach Esther as the historical book that it is, as an account of things that happened while the Jews were exiled in the land of Babylon after the Medes and Persians conquered that empire and set up their own. Some believe this Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever seen. It covered what we call today Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel as well as parts of modern day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia. The time is likely the fifth century B.C. The place is modern day Iran maybe 100 miles north of the Persian Gulf… Esther 1:1-5, 9-13, 16-20.

Intro: “Put in Everything” for Christ because without God’s presence and purpose in our lives, we are living out a tragedy.

            This story about Xerxes and Vashti serves to set the context for Esther, helping us to understand the world in which she was called to serve her people and her Lord. Everything about this world is highly political, highly public, and greatly disappointing for a Jewish woman like Esther.

            Esther’s world is full of tragedy:

**I. The King Is Neither Good nor Wise (but still God is able)**

            A. PROUD and Ostentatious: The King Who Has It All

                        1. Look at the King on his throne, surrounded by fawning subjects eager to do his bidding.

                        2. Look at his amazing wealth and generosity, a never-ending party for all his friends.

                        3. Look at the splendor of these surroundings

                        4. Look at the food and wine, a banquet extravagant beyond memory for all citizens who wish to come.

            B. Undisciplined: Must get drunk to really feel good about himself. He has got to use some kind of drug, of course, to endure all the pressures of his position, all the stress of his responsibilities. Drugs have been associated with wealth and power for so long. The mother of King Lemuel felt compelled to address alcohol use and treatment of women for her royal son when only giving counsel on a few things.

            C. Insecure: He must not only be the wealthiest and most powerful man in the world. There is another thing he must have, must possess. He must have at his side the beautiful woman in the world.

                        1. Beauty is one of the three great values along with money wisdom. makes a Drunken Request Public to All

                        2. He should not be calling for his wife when he is drunk

                        3. He should not be making public this dubious request

**II. The King’s Is Drunken and Angry (but still God is able)**

            A. Vashti’s husband is drunk, but he is not drunk alone. His friends and running buddies are also drunk.

            B. The alcohol impairs his judgment. Sober he might never have issued such a summons to his Queen. But drunk he is likely to do anything. Given that his entire entourage is likely inebriated, he is not afforded the good counsel of friends.

            C. The Drunken Husband acts in fierce anger. His anger seems unjustified on the surface given that he has issued this impolite and improper summons to his Queen. Her refusal really calls for a private conversation, but he does not have the wisdom to see it. He unwisely expands the conflict beyond his own bedroom into his cabinet.

**III. Women Are Treated as Decorations (but still God is able)**

            A. This is not a woman’s world, ancient Persia. Women are the property of men. Beautiful women give them bragging rights and elevate their status among their peers.

            B. Vashti as endured a marriage without true **Intimacy.** Marriage is supposed to be the delightful bonding of two persons at the most intimate level: body, soul, and spirit.

            C. In Persia, apparently, the woman is valued mainly if not only for her physical beauty. The summons that Vashti receives to come before the banquet with her royal crown may involve immodesty.

                        1. A person is reduced to physical beauty, to flesh only, to a piece of meat. Physical beauty itself is not the problem. The problem is treating women—or men—as if that is the highest or only value that matters.

                        2. Vashti was called up, according to Jewish tradition, because the drunken guests at the feast were debating which country had the most beautiful women. Xerxes claimed that his queen was Miss Persian Empire, the most beautiful in all the 127 provinces.

            We all know now that New York State has the most beautiful women in America having won three Miss America contests in succession. Right? King Xerxes will settle this debate for all time in his kingdom by having a beauty contest for his next queen, and Esther will be crowned Miss Persian Empire.

            D. The public nature of the King’s summons eliminates any possible of an intimate conversation with the Queen. A public response—to appear or not—is assured given the nature of the king’s summons. For reasons of taste and modesty, she refused. To preserve her own humanity, dignity and honor, she refused the king’s summons.

**IV. The Royal Counselors Are Fearful and Fawning (still God is able)**

            A. Every leader surrounds himself with counselors. These groups have various names. But they are extremely important people.

            B. This king is neither good nor wise, it appears from the very first. He is especially dependent upon good and wise people to help him in his decision-making.

            C. The good judgment of his counselors is aborted by the temperament, the insecurities and volatility of their boss. Not only will he tolerate no difference of opinion, but he will respond violently to those who get outside of his parameters.

**V. Marriage Is in Trouble (still God is able)**

            A. The Queen speaks for all women, somehow

            B. Her refusal is an affront to the throne not to a drunken husband who is gradually sobering up and wondering what to do.

            C. Ending a marriage for Appearance sake.