

**“A King’s Self-Love”**  
**Esther Chapter 1**

**Big Idea:** Ahasuerus loved himself to his detriment. Self-love only destroys the person and those around him/her. Seek to be like Jesus, selfless.

**Outline:**

Self-love exploits wealth	1-8
Self-love exploits people	9-12
Self-love exploits power	13-22

**Conclusion:**

## **Manuscript**

Why are we selfish? Because we love ourselves. We love ourselves way too much. Self-love is the real pandemic in our world today. Once when I was a teenager I had plans with my friends. I couldn't drive yet so my mother was going to take me to my friend's house while she was out and about running errands. Well, her plans changed. And when she told me she couldn't take me, I had a fit. I threw one of the biggest fits I'd ever thrown and she finally gave in and went out of her way to take me. Ruined her whole afternoon. That's what self-love does.

This morning we begin our study in Esther and the first thing we're going to look at is a king infected with self-love. But first, let me give you some background.

## **Introduction:**

The Israelites have been in exile. In 586 BC, at the end of 2 Chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Assyria, sacks Jerusalem and leads Jewish exiles to Babylon. This was the third time Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem this time leaving only the poorest of the poor among a ruined city. Basically, nothing was left of Judah. Because both Judah and Israel had forsaken God, though God in His grace had sent them many prophets warning what would happen. The Israelites failed to repent and, as God had said would happen in Deuteronomy chapter 28, He scattered the Israelites.

In 539 BC, some 47 years later, Cyrus of Persia overthrew the Babylonian king, Nabonidus. Assyria fell to Persia. The next year, Cyrus writes a decree for the Jewish people to return home to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel the priest led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem and they rebuilt the temple finishing at around 516 BC, 70 years after they were exiled to Babylon in accordance with the Lord's prophecy that Israel would be exiled 70 years.

The setting of the book of Esther takes place after the seventy-year exile of the Jews to Babylon between the first return of the Jewish exiles led by Zerubbabel in 538 BC and the second return of Jewish exiles led by Ezra in 458 BC.

By the time the events of the book of Esther, the temple had already been rebuilt. The seventy-year exile was technically over. However, many Jews still remained scattered throughout the provinces of Persian empire. This is extremely important as we will see throughout our study.

One of the purposes of the book of Esther was to explain the origin of the Jewish holiday Purim. Purim, you may know, is a Jewish holiday celebrating the day the Jews were delivered from their enemies during the events that take place in the book of Esther. The writer of Esther, who is unknown to us, wrote to explain the holiday's origins. But much deeper than the origin of Purim is the theme of the providence of God. Providence is God's sovereignty at work. MacArthur would say: "providence is how God orchestrates everything to accomplish His purpose.

One important thing to note about the book of Esther, she is not the main character. It might appear that she is, but actually the main character in this story is never even named. God, YHWH, is the main character of this book. God, like I said, is not mentioned, but He is active. Esther is a book about ungodly people. It's a book about brokenness, ugliness, sinfulness. Messed up politicians and messed up citizens. Yet, God is deeply at work. When you read Esther, it appears like a random set of coincidences. If this hadn't happen, this wouldn't have happened. If X didn't happen, Y wouldn't have happened. But it's not coincidence, it's providence. Esther is about God's providence, He is always working, even among a people not fully loyal to Him. John MacArthur compares to the book of Esther to a cosmic chess game between God and Satan. For a time, it looks like Satan has the upper hand, but God has been positioning His pieces in just the right way... and what happens? Well, let's find out... Let's dig in...

**1 Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, 3 in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants.**

Now, a person reading this in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC would know exactly who the author was talking about. "Oh, that Ahasuerus," But we are twenty-five hundred years removed from this time. So, we need a little bit of filler. Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, which was his Greek name, was the Persian king who reigned from 486-465 BC. He inherited his kingdom from his father and, as you can see on the map, it was vast, extending from India to Thrace which is now Southern Bulgaria and part of Tukiye and down into Egypt. The 127 provinces mentioned here, are likely small regions ruled by governors.

Now, Susa, the citadel, was one of four places from which the Persian monarchs would rule. Susa, was the winter residence for the reigning Monarch. You can see on the map, Susa was further south. The monarch would reign from there in the winter and then move elsewhere at other times of the year because of the heat.

We're told in verse 3, that in the third year of his reign, 483 BC, he gave a feast. But not just any feast, a massive feast. And, as we'll see, he had an agenda with this feast. Read on.

**The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him,**

Real quick, Persia and Media were separate nations but they were ethnically related. When the Persian king, Cyrus over through Assyria, the Medes joined with the Persians and thus became this Medo-Persia empire. Now, all these high-profile people are at this feast. Nobles and governors, politicians in other words. This is no mere get-together for a meal. This feast was lavish. Picture in your dishes of succulent meats, mounds of exotic fruits and bowls of drink on large tables decorated for just such an occasion. Banquets, by the way, play a huge role in the book of Esther. There are banquets here in chapter 1, a banquet in chapter 2, again in chapters 5 and 7 and the feasting and celebration in chapter 9. Watch what happens next:

**4 while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.**

All these political people are gathered for this extravagant feast and Ahasuerus displays his immense riches. Picture mounds of gold and silver and bronze and jewels. It was not uncommon for a monarch to display their wealth and power like we see here. There was so much to see, it took half a year for Ahasuerus to show off his wealth. Half a year. If you were to come to my house, and I showed around and even took you through my closets, in my basement, into my back yard, even into my shed to show you all I had. It would take maybe an hour? And I promise you'd be bored after five minutes.

Imagine taking 180 days to show off all that wealth. I can't picture it. It's astonishing. For someone to have so much, it's honestly repulsive to think someone could have that much stuff. And you'd think after all that time, Ahasuerus would be tired of showing off, But he's not done yet.

**5 And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.**

At the end of the 180 days, he gives another feast, this time to both the great and the small. Everyone was invited. This is the second feast mentioned in chapter 1. This feast takes place in the garden of the king's palace. The palace was large gazebo-shaped building surrounded by a garden with exotic trees and plants. There were pools and baths. It was a lush place. This is where the feast took place. The author goes on to describe the decorations:

**6 There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.**

The detail here is another picture of Ahasuerus' wealth. The palace was, no doubt, dazzling. Again, it suggests that Ahasuerus' intent was to impress his guests.

The detail here is interesting. No other place in scripture describes in detail the beauty of such a place except in reference to the temple. And that's the point. Any Jewish reader at this time would think of the temple when reading this passage.

**7 Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. 8 And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.**

Typically, during these kinds of parties, the protocol was, when the king drank, everyone drank. That protocol was relaxed here in verses 7 and 8 so that people drank whenever they wanted.

What do we have here? A man with literally anything and everything at his fingertips. We find king Ahasuerus here showing off his wealth, which was common among ancient royals. They would have great banquets to show off their wealth, celebrate military successes or drum up support for military campaigns. Why? Isn't that what men do? Don't we love our toys? Don't we love to show off our new gadgets and achievements? Yes, but that's not all that's going on here.

Ahasuerus' father was king Darius. Yes, the king Darius in Daniel chapter 6 when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. King Darius fought against Athens Greece in 486 BC. Ahasuerus was seeking to gain support for a military campaign against the Greeks. So, a major reason why he's having this party, that 180 days, is to show his officials that he has the resources to take down the Greeks. He's trying to impress them to gain their confidence.

Ahasuerus is a man in love with himself and he will do whatever he has to do to accomplish what he wants. That's what self-love does. It uses anything and everything for its own purposes.

That brings us to our first point:

Point 1: Self-love exploits wealth      1-8

Ahasuerus is flaunting his treasure to convince his political leaders that he can finance the provisions necessary to finally take down the Greeks. And he is successful in gaining their confidence. History tells us Ahasuerus did march to Athens Greece and did fight against the Greeks. The irony is, he lost. In 479 BC, king Ahasuerus watched as his navy was destroyed at Salamis. No amount of treasure could guarantee his victory.

To exploit is to take full use of or take full benefit of something. In Ahasuerus' case, he exploited his wealth, hoping to use it to gain the support he needed to extend his empire and avenge his father. But he failed.

And that's what self-love does. It's cancerous. Self-love seeks only to gratify itself but ends up consuming itself. Self-love seeks out ways gain advantage, trusting in its own resources. In what ways are you loving self? You might say: "how would I know I'm loving self?" Let me ask you a question, what do you exploit? What do you trust in? How are you depending on material things rather than God?

Remember Blockbuster video stores? When was the last time you were at a Blockbuster? I remember in the 90's as a teenager, going to Blockbuster was a Friday event! We'd get a movie or a Nintendo game and have a lot of fun. Blockbuster stores were everywhere and that was of the problem. As the industry changed, things like Netflix came along where you could pump entertainment into your home without leaving your couch. Blockbuster depended on their stores. They figured people would keep coming but they didn't. In 2010, Blockbuster went

bankrupt as a result of trusting in their stores and failing to keep up with the changes in industry.

How do we fall into this trap? It's really easy. We pursue jobs, cars, houses, material possessions, good food, we're caught up in the ecstasy of it all and somewhere under the surface, deep inside, our hearts fool us into thinking this will gratify my deepest longing- do this for you. We put our trust into so many things, why? Because we're looking for something to make us happy. Why? Because we love ourselves.

"Your love for yourself is very simply your desire to be happy and to do whatever it takes to make your life the way you want it."

-John Piper

What's so wrong with that? Well, nothing. Except our self-love turns to selfishness. Ahasuerus loved himself and used all he had for selfish reasons.

Are we really that different? What has God given you? How does it snatch your affection away from Him? Nothing wrong with possessions. Nothing wrong with wealth. But when we are so consumed with material things, looking to them for our satisfaction or exploiting them to gain something else in hopes of gaining satisfaction, we are a far cry what really satisfies.

In what ways do your possessions or possessions you would like to have, dominate your heart?

Trust in possessions and wealth. Identity in what I have.

Mistrust. Don't put your trust in possessions and power.

### **9 Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.**

The Queen, of course, would have had her own apartments or estates to entertain just as the king did. However, what's interesting is Persian culture did not dictate men and women eating separately. We're not given a reason why the queen was not with the king, however, one commentator suggests that their separation at the feast may foreshadowed their separation soon to come.

**10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.**

Merry with wine was a nice way to say he was drunk. The party had been going on for seven days. It's interesting to note that history records Persians would make important decisions

while drinking. It was a custom to plan and drink and then validate the plans once they were sober.

Eunuchs served the king in various capacities. As awful as it is, eunuchs were highly valued because they couldn't have families to distract them from serving, they could be entrusted with the care of the king's harem- they posed no sexual threat there and they couldn't engender children by the harem and possibly have children mistaken as royalty and they would be less likely involved in conspiracies because they had no heirs to subvert the throne. So, you can see from a king's point of view why they were valued so highly. The reason for sending seven, when one would do, is probably another way of flaunting his possessions.

Now watch what happens...

**12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.**

Having shown off all of his massive wealth, he now wants to show off his greatest treasure, his queen. Vashti refusing to come at the king's command has been quite a topic among many people. Some think that her refusal was defiant. She was summoned to the king to show off her beauty while entertaining all these women and simply responded in defiance. But there might be more to the story here. Note the reason for her refusal isn't given. The queen was expected to come when the king called. He had absolute authority.

At this time, it was prohibited by law for royal women to appear in public. They would travel around in enclosed carriages. The only women who were seen at these parties were dancers and concubines. For the king to have Vashti come and be visible would have been beneath her station she would have been treated like a common servant girl.

Another interesting note, the king's son, Artaxerxes who would take the throne when Ahasuerus died, was born this same year. It could be that Vashti was very pregnant at this time and unable to appear in public.

Whatever the reason, she refused and the result was the king lost face in front of those he was trying to impress and he got angry.

Our second point we see from the text:

Point 2 Self-love exploits people.

We've already talked about how Ahasuerus exploited his wealth to gain support for his campaign against Greece, now we see he's exploiting people, namely his queen.

Ahasuerus is drunk and honestly, acting like a fool. Who, in their right mind, would parade their wife in front of a huge group of drunken men? Someone who's in love with themselves. That's who.

Using wealth or possessions to gain approval or increase status is bad enough. Using people is down right appalling. And if you think about it, he's not just exploiting his queen, he's also exploiting his military to get them to support his endeavors.

Ahasuerus will use anyone and everyone to get done what he wants done.

One time in college, a guy I knew, but didn't really have a relationship with, invited me up to his room to play video games. Out of the blue. I thought it was weird, but hey videogames- cool. So, I went and spent an hour or so playing games. The next day, I had this mini tape recorder. You remember cassettes, I had a mini one to record lectures. He asks to borrow it. He was just trying to butter me up so he could borrow my recorder. I wish he had just asked instead of thinking he had to get in my good graces or whatever.

Now, compared to Ahasuerus, that was tiny thing. I hold no ill will to him, but be careful not to exploit people, not to use people. How do we know if we're exploiting someone? After all, our hearts are desperately wicked, we could be doing this and not even realizing it.

Watch out that people, relationships, don't become means to an end.

One way you know you're exploiting someone is if you get angry when they don't want to do what you want to do. Again, that goes back to self-love, it's all about you.

If you are constantly pointing out a person's mistakes and weaknesses to look better, that's a sign of exploiting someone.

If you don't express gratitude and appreciation, that could be a sign you're using that person as a means to an end.

Now relationships are tricky, I know. And if you catch yourself doing something like what I just said, that doesn't automatically make you a bad person. But we need to be careful with our relationships. Let love be your guide.

So, the queen refused to come. The king gets angry. So, what does he do?

**13 Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, 14 the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom):**

The king gathers his most trusted advisors, this was a wise thing to do. Before making any rash decisions, talking with trusted people is smart! But you have to be careful who you talk to. These would have been the highest-ranking officials- they saw the king's face- meaning they

were close to him, not just anyone could get close to the king. By the way, Daniel could have been one these during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

**15 “According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?” 16 Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.**

In other words, all your guests.

**17 For the queen’s behavior will be made known to all women,**  
The wives of your guests will hear of this.

**causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.’ 18 This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s behavior will say the same to all the king’s officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.**

What happened to you will happen to your officials and you’ll lose all support. Vashti is about to undo everything he’s been trying to accomplish for 180 days! Beware the power of a woman.

They’re saying: “This is bad king, this is very bad.” You know what’s motivating them? Anger yes, but also fear. Fear of losing control.

You want to know the ironic thing about king Ahasuerus, he had total control of an empire that almost encompassed the known world but he could not control himself and he could not control his queen.

The fear of losing control or losing respect. The deepest need of a man is have respect and king Ahasuerus is about to lose, not only the respect of his queen, but also the respect of his officials.

What are we going to do about this?

Motivated by anger and fear

Contempt: despise, think contemptuously (loss of respect)

Wrath in plenty?

**19 If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.**

The royal order was ruling that could not be revoked. There are one of two possibilities, either the king, by law, could not revoke it or it would have been considered shameful for the king to reverse something he put in order. In an honor/shame culture, that would be unacceptable. Once this ruling goes into effect, there's no turning back. This is very important because it sets up a huge element of the story to come later.

Vashti here is not executed or even divorced. She demoted. It's likely she actually stayed with the king's harem, but would no longer be able to come before the king. She's also not free to marry another. Once you're in the king's harem- you belong to him. In other words, Vashti is, essentially banished within the kingdom. She's a prisoner with no hope of having any kind of life.

**20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." 21 This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. 22 He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.**

Point 3: Self-love exploits power      13-22

The king has absolute authority. And because of anger and fear, he and his advisors, resort to forcing all the women in the kingdom to honor their husbands. The fear of losing respect drives these men to force respect from women. Which is really no respect at all.

The king's self-love has caused him to use his power to manipulate and control every woman in his empire. He responds to his own fear by putting fear into others.

No one in this room has the absolute power that Ahasuerus did. But we all have power to one degree or another. Some are physically stronger, some hold positions of authority, some are educated well, some speak very well. What kind of power do you have? Power's not a bad thing- after all, God has infinite power. But, unlike Ahasuerus, God is completely under control. Power's not bad, it's how we use our power.

What kind of power do you have and how do you use it? Do you use your power to influence or intimidate? Do you use your power to help others or strictly help yourself? Put a different way, do you keep yourself under control? When faced with a situation where you could exercise power to dominate the situation, do you instead look for ways to love?

Three things we see about king Ahasuerus. He exploited his wealth to gain the confidence of his soldiers. He tried to exploit his queen to show her off, and he exploited his power out of anger and fear to dominate the women of his kingdom. All because he was infected with self-love.

We all struggle with self-love. You might think the way to conquer self-love is to self-loath but that's not the answer. We're never told in God's Word to hate ourselves. Interestingly the Bible doesn't tell us not to love ourselves or loath ourselves, it tells us to love others like we love ourselves- to the depth you love yourself, love others. The Bible's not telling us to love ourselves, that's not the focus, that's not the message, it's just a fact, everyone loves self. I wouldn't even say that's a product of the fallen world, I would say the product of a fallen world is that we love ourselves too much. The Bible doesn't tell us to not love ourselves, rather, it tells us to love your neighbor as yourself. Seek their good in the same way you seek your good. Seek their comfort, the same way you seek your comfort. Seek their protection, the same way you seek your protection. How do we do that?

Fix our love on Christ. Fix your love on He who loves you without measure. What is the Gospel? The Gospel is, I am wretched, yet loved, I am forgiven so I can know and love God. And by extension, I can love others.

I want you to see something. Everything that has happened so far in the book of Esther is a set of "coincidences". If the king had not gotten drunk and ordered his queen to come. If Vashti had not refused and if the king and his counselors had not put this law into effect... the whole story of Esther would not have happened. What's going on? God is at work behind the scenes. What does that teach us? That even the most sinful, repulsive acts of men cannot thwart the sovereign plan of God. Here is the mind-blowing truth about God. You are a part of His plan whether you want to be or not. Whether you accept Him or reject Him you are a part of His ultimate plan. King Ahasuerus did not submit to God, he was a wicked man. But He was a part of God's plan. So are you. You can either receive Him, be a part of His plan and be blessed by Him or you can reject Him, still be a part of His plan but miss out both here in time and forever in eternity. Either way, you are a part of God's sovereign plan so don't let today end without turning to Him. Jesus offers forgiveness of sins. Jesus offers salvation. Jesus offers new life simply by repenting of your sin and turning to Him in faith. Won't you receive Him now? Come talk to one of us after the service if you have questions about that.

Follower of Jesus, you are a part of God's providential plan. He is working in your life right now. Your failures will not thwart His plan. Let that be an encouragement to you. Some of you have deep regrets in your life. Whatever lies in your past, whatever failures happen in your present, whatever pain you've caused as a result of self-love, God is not thwarted by that. Yes, there are consequences for our sins, even loss of heavenly reward, but God has a plan that can't be thwarted. He is weaving a tapestry with the threads of every human life to bring about His providential plan and, somehow, despite our failures, His plan will not be thwarted and we, believers in Jesus, get to partake in the magnificent blessings of His providential plan. Let that encourage you, because no matter what you've done, He is working.

Right now, God is at work in your life. Even when I don't see it, You're working. Even when I don't feel it, You're working. You never stop working. The many thousands of "coincidences" in your life all have purpose. One day, we'll be able to step back and view our lives and see how God was working behind the scenes to incorporate us in His master plan.

In John 12:27, Jesus says: "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name."

There was a plan, a plan of redemption. And Jesus, God Himself, had made a promise- a promise He would not repeal even when it came to the cross. The apex of God's plan happened at the cross. The many millions of sins done at the hands of vile, twisted, self-loving people were poured onto the only completely selfless man who ever lived. When Jesus was praying in the garden, three times He came to the disciples, you know what He found them doing each time? Sleeping. Jesus was in agony. He was facing the cross, He knew what was coming. He had asked His closest friends to watch and pray during His most vulnerable hour and what did these clueless, bumbling, self-loving disciples do? They fell asleep. Jesus comes to them, sees them sleeping. These are the people He's going die for? These are the people He's going to be scourged for? These are the people He's going to wear a crown of thorns for? Be stripped for? Be nailed to a cross for? Be stabbed for? Be mocked for? People who couldn't even stay awake with Him? That's who He was doing this for?

Self-centered, self-love could only be cured by an act of selflessness. That's what Jesus did at the cross. Preach that truth to yourselves every day and watch your self-love give way to selfless, God-honoring, others-focused, life-changing agape love.