

Season 2, Episode 2: Vashti Falls (Chapter 1)

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Sarah: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK and this is my sister Felicity and she lives in the US. Hello, everyone. Hello, Felicity. What's in your cup today?

Felicity: Gone for a classic Earl Gray's from Whittard, no less, just recently come back from the UK, so I'm full of posh tea varieties. It's pleasant, it's good, but I am accompanying it with a classic American cookie. A friend kindly delivered oatmeal butterscotch cookies and they are outstanding. What about you?

Sarah: Sounds good. I've got one of those biscuits, you know, in the packet when they say, this is like your breakfast in a biscuit. Milk plus cereal equals a biscuit. It's just not true, is it? My breakfast does not consist of a biscuit. I mean, it tastes all right, but I wouldn't just have one of these for breakfast. So it's fine as a biscuit, not as my breakfast, is my conclusion.

Felicity: I agree. The size of them is never going to be sufficient to keep you going.

Sarah: I don't know how they market it. Is that for some reason I buy it because I think it's going to be a healthy biscuit, so I buy it for my children. But I think it's just a biscuit, isn't it, really?

Felicity: Yes. And biscuits and breakfast. As I keep on telling my eldest son, that just doesn't happen. We don't do that. He walks into the kitchen for breakfast and the biscuit tins are on his right and he always just sort of stands longingly until I point to the cereal cupboard. That's where we're going.

Sarah: Anyway, we are getting stuck into Esther, chapter One today. After last week's episode, we just kind of gave a bit of an overview. Don't wear what the book is about and where we're headed with it. We are going to get stuck right into chapter One today. Flissy, do you want to read it for us and then let's get going?

Felicity: Absolutely. This is what happened during the time of the Zerksis, the exercises who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Kush. At that time, King Zerkse reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Sousa. And in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials, the military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom in the splendor and glory of His Majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days in the enclosed garden of the king's palace for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Sousa. The garden had hanging of white and blue linen fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings. On marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver and a mosaic pavement or porphyry marble, mother of pearl and other costly stones. Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant in keeping with the king's liberality. But the king's command by the king's command, each guest was allowed to drink without restriction, for the king instructed all the wines to us to serve each man what he wished. Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes's. On the 7th day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him mohamm, Bista, Habana, Bigfa, Abakhva, Zephyr and Carcass to bring before him Queen Vashdy, wearing her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely

to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king. Kashina, Sheffer, Admirpha, Tashi, Merris, Martin and Mehkin the seven nobles of Persia and Media, who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom according to law. What must be done to Queen Vashdy? He asked. She has not obeyed the command of King Zerkse that the eunuchs have taken to her. Then Mimukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, queen Vashdy has done wrong not only against the king, but also against all the nobles and the people of all the provinces of King Zerkse's. For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women and so they will despise their husbands and say king Xerxes commanded Queen VSH to be brought for him, but she would not come. This very day, the Persian and medium women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles. In the same way, there will be no end of disrespect and discord. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media which cannot be repealed, that vastly he is never again to enter the presence of King Zerkse's. Also, let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then, when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands from the least to the greatest. The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice. So the king did as Memokan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household using his native tongue.

Sarah: Thank you, Christie. It's quite a start, isn't it? I don't know about you, but what really struck me, just reading that again just now, is just this glorious picture of exerting his kingdom in that first kind of seven or eight verses. It really is so resplendent, isn't it? It's a beautiful picture of like, wealth and riches and abundance and there's banquets left, right and center. He's celebrating for half a year with how powerful and vast his kingdom is. And those words in verse four, he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

Felicity: There's a lot on display, isn't it? It's very visual, the fact that the narrator is included, all these different descriptions of the stones and the colors and the decor of this mammoth party that's been going on for a very long time. And even then, as we get into the vast bit, then the word display comes up a few times as well. Not only the things are on display, but the people are very much on display as well. I think that's why we get all these names as well. There are so many people involved in this empire which actually would have felt like the world, wouldn't it? 127 provinces. I read something was saying that maybe he was preparing to go and attack somewhere else. Maybe Greece. The Greek Empire or something. So he was trying to persuade others to get in with him because he really is the most powerful, the most wealthy, the most splendid. And so there's a kind of purpose in it in that sense. But that's interesting, isn't it? Just in the very idea that show them your wealth and your power and they'll throw their lot in with you and that's where it's at.

Sarah: But then that is then the wonderful irony of the chapter as well, isn't it? Because actually you get that all at the beginning and then very quickly the storyteller starts to kind of expose what's actually underneath that appearance and you say, underneath what's on display. And we get this very interesting scene where he calls Ashley to come and display her beauty and yet she refuses. And just how quickly that kind of escalates into not just a kind of marital dispute, but something for the whole kingdom and the whole empire to be concerned with is kind of crazy, isn't it?

Felicity: I love the way the writer has done it. If you just look at verse twelve, the succinctness of it. Queen Vasty refused to come full stop. That's it. All this, like, power and wealth, and Vastly just said no. And then with that, as you say, unfolds this domestic crisis, which suddenly turns into a state crisis, a nationwide empire wide issue, which in itself, I think, reveals the King's weakness, doesn't it? He can't even deal with marriage, like with his own home. He doesn't know how to relate to his wife.

Sarah: No. And he quickly escalates. He asks for advice. He says, according to the law, must be done. He's asking for experts in matters of law and justice. So how quickly he can

escalate it himself and then how quickly the people he asks escalate it and go, well, this isn't going to be good for homes around the kingdom, so this is what you should do. And how quickly then Vastly is banished and taken out.

Felicity: Yeah, that is it like taken out so quickly that's it one refusal, she's out. And that could have, I feel like it could have been dealt with just if that's going to be the way it goes, then bash she's just quietly dismissed. And as we'll see in the next chapter, he has particularly, well, not very nice ways of going about seeking the next Queen, but instead you get this law and this decree that's sent out to the whole empire, so everyone is going to know about his disaster at home. And so, in that, I think in that, you do see that he's really not very much in control, he's not as powerful, he's not as wonderful as the scene first depicted. I wonder whether that is what the narrator is doing. He's kind of like showing us the inside, the weak inside, the unraveling inside of this splendid outside.

Sarah: I think it does prompt you to think that, doesn't it? Because I think the language of verse four of displaying the vast wealth of his kingdom, the splendor and glory of His Majesty, that feels very Godlike, that feels very reminiscent of how the Lord is described and how his kingdom is described. And yet then very quickly we see that unraveling and see how actually that's not the case for the rest of his kingdom. That's just a display of wealth. But actually, underneath, there's a man who is weak, he's drunk and who is very malleable, isn't he? He's very receptive to what anyone is going to tell him. As we see the whole way through the book. He doesn't actually have the power that he is wanting to display. Yeah, we don't actually know he's written the Book of Esther, do we? But I think if they're wanting to set up a contrast here it is. You can't see this picture of the kingdom, the world's power, the world's kingdom, and yet, actually, it doesn't compare to the glory and splendor of God's majesty. And we're seeing straight away that this fits with that.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right, sir. I think that as he is kind of unpicked and emptied of that splendor and majesty and we see that he actually is not really in control, then it causes us to look for a contrast, to look for someone who is in control, which is kind of like a sneak peek over to chapter two, isn't it? Because I think it's in chapter 32 that we begin to see and we hear a little more of God's people, and the presence of God, even in the book that he's not named in, begins to become apparent in chapter two. But here I wonder whether the narrator is kind of emptying the power spot so that we are then looking and ready to see that actually the one true God is the one who is in charge and who does have the power, ultimate power.

Sarah: And I think that's kind of right, isn't it? This is written, if you think about it, it's written after the exile, it's written after all the Psalms, it's written in the timeline of the Bible. God's people are well familiar with the longing for the Messiah, for the Anointed One. And you're left longing for the One, as you say, who is in control. You're left longing for that anointed King who does display complete splendor and glory of His Majesty. You're left longing for the one who doesn't banish his bride because she says no. In so many ways, we could have got these shadows of what actually Jesus does provide as the true King, even though it's not talked about.

Felicity: Do you know, I think that's very true. That is a classic case of if you were just to read chapter one, you wouldn't see that, I don't think. But as you take it as a part of the whole story, then you begin to see these wonderfully exciting kind of shadows in the midst of what is really quite a full description of the world, isn't it? The Persian Empire, I think, in many ways does represent the world. And I wonder, as we read it and as we see that unraveling of it, it just is a warning to us when we maybe get seduced by what's on display around us, what the world looks like, what looks to be the splendor and the majesty and the power. Because I think at the time, this would have been he's saying the least and the greatest. Everyone is welcome at this party and you'd be thinking, great, I'm in the King's palace, I've made it, I'm in the power spot. And actually that is not the best place to be. And we're going to see that in the next chapter even more. But at this stage, maybe it's just.

Sarah: A bit of a heads up as.

Felicity: We look around at our world and see what is seductive and what seems to be the best place to be. I don't know. What do you think have you thought along those lines at all?

Sarah: Yeah, I think just in terms of, like, what who were tempted to side with and actually will we always side with God's King versus the powers of this world? I think that's a valuable question, isn't it, to ask? And that could be just at the school gates, but that could be also, like, on a much bigger scale as well. And actually, are we willing to see what's exposed at the heart of the world's powers and the world's opinions and kind of the world's ways of doing things? And I think what Esther does is it's a really sobering book, a really sobering and kind of tragic themes in this book that we're going to come across, and even vastly the fall of Ashley. It's heartbreaking there, isn't it? She's just banished from this kingdom without a second glance. That's it. It's awful. It's awful the way that he's treating his yes, absolutely. And yet it's kind of set in this humor to describe these really sobering things going on. And yeah, I think it prompts us to just kind of unwrap what's going on in our world, I guess, as we were saying, what do we tend to decide with? Are we actually seeing it, for what it's worth, compared to almighty Gods, the creator of the ends of the Earth, the everlasting God?

Felicity: Yes. And I think that is because we do have God in all his glory to compare, as the Bible has revealed to us, the Lord. So we do have a comparison. If we have no God to compare this to this world, then all we're left with is the world. Okay, which part of the world should I throw my lot in with? This is all we've got. But because we do have God and we know who he is, and all the more so this side of the cross, as we look at Jesus, we have such a picture of glory and the compassionate Lord Jesus. And so as we have that comparison, so we can choose God and we can look to Him more and look for Him more. I think, as we go on in the book of Esther, this chapter primes us to then look for God and look for his hand to be at work and look for his power, which is not acknowledged by King Zerkse and his crew, but is evidently at work. And as we see later on, we'll see the rises and the falls, and they do seem to be in the hands of God rather than Zerkse.

Sarah: Yeah. And that's why this chapter is so crucial to the rest of the book, isn't it, that actually Bashi's downfall enables Esther's rise that we're going to see next time, and that enables God's salvation plan to be put into effect, doesn't it, as things progress through the book? So this introduction is crucial to the rest of the book, but it's also heartbreaking and it's real life. We're getting a glimpse into this kingdom and there's harder stuff to come. But it's good to be here, isn't it? It's good to be kind of wrestling with these big themes together.

Felicity: Absolutely. And I think already we're longing for God to step in, aren't we? Do you want to pray for us, Sarah, as we wrap that up?

Sarah: I'd love to. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. We thank you that all the world's powers, all the world's kingdoms, whether good or bad, are under Your sovereign hand. We thank you that there is nothing that cannot be blown to dust by you. We thank you that everything is placed by Your will and by Your hands. And we pray. As we let chapter one kind of sit on our hearts, we pray. Lord, please, would you help us to just apply this deeply to our hearts? Would you grow us in a richer view of Your sovereign hand, of Your kingdom, of Your goodness as we look at the world around us? Please, Lord, did you help us to grow in our view of Jesus ultimately and give him the glory? We pray. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Thank you. So not too late to be asking people to listen along with you. And do check out our show notes, where we have questions to help you have that conversation over a cup of tea and in the show notes, as well as a discount code for ten of those.com to go and pick up some of these wonderful books that we're recommending along the way. I think that's it, Sarah. Have you finished your breakfast? Not breakfast, biscuit.

Sarah: It wasn't that nice, actually.

Felicity: Not worth finishing.

Sarah: Oh, I know.

Felicity: Well, that is the bar to reach.

Sarah: Who can reach it. I know. All right, we'll see you next time. Yeah, see you next time. Bye.

Felicity: Bye.

Sarah: Bye.

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