

Providence and Prayerful Courage - Esther 4:1-17
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

“And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” These words from the lips of Mordecai through the servant Hathach to Esther stand as the best known and most powerful quote in this amazing story. The story is at its pivot moment. The awful genocidal decree has been given by the wicked Haman. Mordecai is joining Jews all over the Persian Empire who have entered a season of intense mourning as they have a death sentence hanging over their head a bit less than a year away. They, their children, their parents, their friends, their religious leaders, all will be slaughtered as a result of the decree issued by King Ahasuerus at Haman’s recommendation. Mordecai is coming to the king’s gate in sackcloth and ashes, wailing and crying out. The sackcloth is basically a burlap bag, a bag made out of goats hair that is primarily for holding grain. It is itchy and uncomfortable, but the wearing of this in Scripture is tied to lament, deep sorrow and sadness. But the sadness does have a direction, which in this book is interesting. We have mentioned several times that the name of God and worship of Him are not mentioned. Yet, a Jewish person reading this chapter would understand that the practices of wearing sackcloth, wailing, and fasting are prayer oriented activities, lamenting and crying out loud to God who hears and can act. They are acts of trust in God’s providence when a person or people feel helpless and hopeless.

But there is one Jewish person who is clueless, the queen enjoying her palace and privilege is not insulated from the suffering of her people. When she hears of Mordecai’s wardrobe and lament her solution is to send him a change of clothes, something akin to asking him to watch a comedy and move on with life and get back to his job. She may also be hopeful that the change of clothes will allow him to enter the palace gates so she can have a conversation with him, since the king has forbid mourners in sack cloth to enter the king’s gate. It’s bad for business to have a group going on the White House tour encounter a random guy wearing nothing but a sack crying out loud and wailing at the top of his lungs. Mordecai refuses but he does send Esther the information about what has happened including a written copy of the edict that condemns them. Esther is now confronted with a dilemma. If she doesn’t approach the king the edict will most likely be carried out resulting in the death of her people. But if she goes to see the king and he does not desire to see her, the sweet palace life she is coming to enjoy will end violently and quickly. Historian Josephus tells us that Xerxes had two guards holding giant axes standing directly behind him ready to carry out the quick execution of anyone who sought to enter his presence without his permission. So Mordecai reminds her of a few things. First, he says deliverance will arise for the Jews from elsewhere if she does not act. This is interesting and is one of the moments the author is reminding us about the central truth of God’s providence in the story. There is no basis for a statement like this except the belief in God’s promises for His chosen people. Throughout Scripture God has promised the descendants of Abraham that He will not forsake them, that He has a purpose for them, that no human king can thwart His purposes, and that one day His eternal King will come from their lineage. The Haman edict is so much more than a threat to the Jews, it is a threat to God’s promised faithfulness. So Mordecai knows that God will deliver. And Mordecai has a strong statement for Esther, if you don’t act you will perish as well. But finally, he makes the great statement declaring that her being swept from the poverty of being a servant to the power of being a princess may be for this very reason, for this very purpose, for this very moment. Esther responds by calling for a fast (which is an allusion to intense prayer for her) and a commitment that she will go to the king, and if she dies, so be it. But she will arise and trust in the providential goodness of God and act.

As we preach the providence of God we are not declaring belief in a deterministic universe where our actions have no meaning. The Bible's story over and over again reveals the God who chooses to accomplish His purpose through the lives of people who trust in Him and respond with boldness to their current situation. While in the end we will see that it is all God, we have a part to play, God in His glory and grace has chosen to include us in His grand story. And we all have "Esther moments" those situations where trusting in Christ may be difficult and even costly, but we also know that our response matters. Belief in God's providence is not a call to "let go and let God." No, rather, it is a call for a bold faith that, like Esther, leads us to bold prayer and dependence and then bold action in the name and for the glory of Jesus. It's a call to live faithfully and make our true identity known even if the outcome is costly for us. It is to realize that our location in life is not an accident, and our job, positions, school lunch table, family situation, and even the place of our home was orchestrated by Christ in order to put a citizen of the Kingdom in these places. And who knows, maybe you are in that place for such a time as this.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Luke 14	Luke 15	Luke 16	Luke 17	Luke 18	Luke 19	Luke 20

Reading from this past week: Esther 4:1-17

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Esther 5:1-14

Family Worship

Song - *Lovingkindness*

<https://youtu.be/xV-fNmt6ZAo>

Gospel Project

Story: Creation glorifies God

Big Picture Question: Why Did God create everything?

Answer: God created everything for His glory and our good.

Scripture: Psalm 19

New City Catechism

Question #38: What is prayer?

Answer: Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God.

Verse: Psalm 63:8

Scripture

Esther 4:1-17

- How does this story demonstrate both Mordecai and Esther's belief in God's providence?
- Why is Esther's asking her people to fast and pray so important as we seek to understand the story?
- Have you ever had an "Esther moment"? What can we do to prepare for the moments where God in His providence has us in a situation where you are there for "such a time as this"?

Prayer

*Pray that God would give you bold faith in His providence for your "Esther moments" in life.

*Pray for the women and our ministry to women.