

“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Esther 4

Introduction.

With the king’s blessing, Haman, driven by an intense hatred of Mordecai and his people, issues a decree for an ethnic cleansing, a killing of all the Jews in the entire empire beginning in about eleven months.

Esther 4:1-17.

Some of you may have seen one of those TV shows or movies that depict some cataclysmic end of the earth like an impending meteor strike. And then the movie shows all the chaos and confusion and how people deal with the world-ending news.

One of the things shows like that do is get us to think about how we would react if we found out that the earth was going to be destroyed next year. It can be a sobering thought experiment, a test of our faith and courage.

Chapter 4 of Esther is that TV show. The Jews are going to be wiped out in 11 months. How would you respond if the government issues a decree to kill all Christians next September?

No wonder the city of Susa was thrown into turmoil and confusion.

Mordecai in mourning with all the Jews, 4:1-3.

This event is a crisis at every level, spiritually, politically, racially. Mordecai has full knowledge of what is going on, he is politically and culturally aware. He is paying attention. Quite a contrast to Ahasuerus and Esther who are pretty much clueless about what is going on.

Christians should be culturally aware and astute and prayerfully discerning (adult SS class).

Mordecai mourns in a manner consistent with the ancient times. Tearing one’s clothes was a public and powerful expression of grief.

“The depth of emotional pain was magnified with putting on ‘sackcloth.’ Sackcloth was a coarse and scratchy material that was very uncomfortable. As with tearing their garments, people put on sackcloth as a way to externally display the discomfort and pain they felt

inside (Sam O'Neal, <https://www.thoughtco.com/why-people-in-the-bible-tore-their-clothes-363391>).

Mordecai is going for maximum emotional impact. This would be like going on the news and getting as much press as possible, going viral. Mordecai takes action. He doesn't just wring his hands feeling all it lost and nothing can be done. He doesn't just weep about it. It may be a risky, but he takes a step, in order to encourage others to take a step.

All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing, and Mordecai is a good man, he does something. He goes to the city gate, the place of action, the place of plans, the place of communication.

Mordecai appeals to Esther, 4:4-9.

His torn clothes and sackcloth and ashes and loud hailing worked, it got the attention of Esther's attendants.

What an interesting communication network. I bet they wish they had cell phones or texting. But the grapevine is the original social media and it works. Mordecai and Esther are able to communicate through palace staff.

Esther apparently is clueless about the decree as she only seems shocked or disturbed by Mordecai's behavior and sends him some new cloths without even finding out first what's wrong.

The good life in the palace has insulated and isolated her from the real world and the needs of the common people, even her own people. That can happen in America, that can happen in Lynden.

This is like some Christians who don't see how serious the problems are in America and think a little new clothes aid will fix it.

Mordecai must wake Esther up and wake up her loyalties. So, he refuses the cloths and forces the issue out into the open. Being quite bold, Mordecai commands Esther to go to the king and beg for favor.

Is God in the picture or is Mordecai the modern man, just seeking a political solution to the problem? Is politics the savior? Are we problem-fixers before we look to God?

Esther's defining moment, 4:10-17.

Mordecai's challenge to Esther comes at a great risk. Esther let's Mordecai know what he is asking is no small or easy thing.

It is against the law for her to go to the king without a formal summons or invitation, and to make matters worse she had not been summoned for 30 days. She is saying she doesn't seem to have the king's favor so it would be a suicide mission. What Mordecai asked was basically impossible.

But Mordecai bluntly cuts to the heart of the issue. *Mordecai says three things to Esther.*

First, he tells her to face up to reality, either way she will die. She may be thinking she is immune from trouble in the palace. There are no loopholes in this decree, it includes every Jew.

Second, he challenges her to act, to get off the fence. If you don't act, someone else will be the deliverer.

How can he be so sure? Perhaps he remembered the promise of God that He would blot out the Amalekites. God doesn't need Esther, if not her, then someone else.

God can raise up children for Himself out of stones if necessary.

Notice Mordecai's faith, deliverance will come from somewhere, God will not abandon His people to destruction. This is a veiled reference to the providence of God.

Is this the moment when Mordecai moves from just seeking a political fix to surrendering the matter to God? He doesn't know how God will do it, but he does believe God will do it.

Third, he says *carpe diem*, seize the day, who knows but that have come to your royal position for just such a time as this.

Esther, do you think this happened just because of your good looks or because of your good fortune, that this is just accidental, with no larger meaning or purpose? Stop looking at life as half empty and start looking at life as half full, that God has something good in mind.

Esther, consider that you are in a better position than anyone else on the planet to do something. You are the wife of the king, the most powerful and ruthless man in the world, (sort of the Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong-un of the day).

Esther, do you really think God is going to sit idly by and allow His people to be destroyed in some ethnic cleansing, especially at the hand of the Amalekites?

Mordecai's question to Esther is asking her to consider the providence of God in her own life. What is God doing, where is the hand of God, why have things worked out the way they have? Trust God, take courage and act.

He is suggesting Esther consider that all the events of her life have been leading up to his moment. Her being in Persia at this moment in history and not Jerusalem, her living in the capital of Susa, her being taken into the king's harem, and then finding favor, her being made queen though a Jew.

Verse 15 is the Kairos moment, the decisive turning point.

She must decide between the possibility of death in facing the king or being killed as a Jew. She must decide between living as a pagan in the luxury of the palace as the queen or identifying herself with the covenant people of God who are under the threat of death.

She is the only person in the book with two names, her Persian name, Esther, and her Hebrew name Hadassah. She is facing an identity crisis. Who is she?

The last queen got thrown out of the palace for standing up and taking her own initiative. If as it appears the king's interest in Esther has cooled then what hope is there for her now?

Esther moves from being passive to active, from a person with weak character to a person of strong moral stature, from receiving demands to giving commands. She takes control of her life and circumstances.

Esther takes two actions, one corporate and one individual.

First, she calls for a three day fast by all the Jews. She embraces her community and her identity, her loyalty, her allegiance.

After lots of feasting and drinking in the book, now a call to a strict fast of no eating or drinking for three days. This is a call to serious commitment, especially if this is over Passover.

There are lots of different kinds of fasts in Scripture of varying lengths, degrees, and for many different purposes. Almost always they are accompanied by prayer, by some serious entreaty of God, seeking Him and His help.

They are an act of humbling ourselves and admitting our utter dependence on God. The purpose of fasting is to deny ourselves, putting ourselves in a place of weakness and dependence, to feel the poverty of our own flesh and spirit and our great need of God.

This is not saying that there is nothing for us to do, so we will just leave it to God. It is saying before we do anything we want to do it in complete dependence on God and His wisdom.

When someone asks you to pray for them take it to heart, join them, pray.

Second, she acts individually, she says after the fast, she will approach the king.

“If I perish, I perish” is not fatalism, but courage. She will place her life in God’s hands and willingly lay it down for others if necessary.

This was her “Not my will but your will be done” moment, her defining moment. She is informed, she knows the risk and some of the possible outcomes, but she sees the need and her place in being able to meet it, so she acts in faith depending on God.

And it is added grace when we can face the future not alone but with the support of a family/church/community.

Implications and Application.

Never underestimate the power of one person through whom God chooses to work.

Athanasius in the fourth century defending the doctrine of God and Christ against the heresies of Arius.

Martin Luther in the sixteenth century stood against the errors of Rome.

William Wilberforce in the nineteenth century almost single handedly abolishing slavery in England. In fact, similar to Mordecai, William Pitt, the Prime Minister of England said to Wilberforce at the beginning of the fight, “Do not lose time, or the ground will be occupied by another.”

Any unknown teacher, parent, or grandparent can change the world. Will you stand up this week against compromise, against falsehood? Where has God positioned us that we might do something important for Christ and His kingdom?

Don’t think about how you can get out of it, think about how God means to use you in the midst of it. What would faithfulness look like in this moment?

We face a choice, doing the right thing at some personal cost, or doing the expedient thing for our own benefit.

And then accept the consequences. If I perish, I perish. If I am ridiculed, I am ridiculed. If I am laughed at, I am laughed at. If I am no longer accepted by my friends, so be it. If I am fired, I am fired. If I suffer, I suffer.

Jesus went to the cross and suffered and came to my aid at great personal cost, I can do this for Him.

Who are you and what are you doing here? Those are the two defining questions in our life. How do we view our existence on this planet? The book of Esther invites us to reflect on that, on our relationship with our creator and redeemer.

We all have defining moments in our lives, maybe not as dramatic as Esther's, but defining nevertheless.

The most important one of course is what do we do with Jesus. Are we going to live as pagans or are we going to believe the Gospel and identify with God's people, His church?

That choice alone will change so many things and set so many other things in motion. Identifying with Christ gives our lives meanings and purposes we can't even imagine, human agents of God's purposes on earth.

But that defining moment isn't the last. Every day we are faced with decisions, are we going to live for self or for Jesus, for the flesh or for the Spirit, going along with the world or in obedience to the Word, taking the path of least resistance or following the narrow, hard path of faith?

Do we do it all hiding our identity or living in the strength of our identity in Christ?

In the face of evil what must we do? Our faith must bear fruit in good works, our faith must have feet.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” - Edmund Burke.

God's purposes and plans for your life are bigger and better than yours, submit to Him, follow Him. And who knows what He may do with you and through you in such a time as this?

Life is meant to be lived and used and spent, to glorify God and serve His and His purpose.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am in a battle I cannot win alone. I not only need Your help, I need You to fight this battle for me. Intervene in those areas over which I have no control and protect me from attacks I cannot withstand. Strengthen me to endure the conflict You choose to allow me to face and show me Your way of escape in each situation I encounter. Watch over and protect my family and others who have engaged the Enemy with me. Grant us a victory that will bring glory to You and allow for the advancement of Your agenda in the world today. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

(http://www.biblemaster.com/studies/study.asp?study_id=425).