

Mordecai's Plan

September 16, 2012

ESTHER 4:1-17

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Core Competency:

Personal God- I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Using This Study

1 EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage.

2 DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

3 LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFEGROUP.

Introduction

"The book implies that even when God's people are far from him and disobedient, they are still the object of his concern and love, and that he is working out his purposes through them..." J. B. Huey

Following the seventy-year exile period, the Jews were given permission to return to their homeland. Some had done so under the leadership of Zerubbabel and had begun to rebuild the temple (see Ezra). Another large group had remained in Persia. Among them were a beautiful young woman named Esther and her cousin/adopted father, Mordecai.

When Vashti, the queen of Persia, defied an order of King Ahasuerus, she was deposed and a search was begun for a new queen.

Somehow, Esther, keeping her Jewish heritage a secret, was included in this royal contest; eventually she became the surprise winner. Meanwhile, Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate the king. Through Esther he was able to get word to the palace and the would-be evildoers were brought to justice.

The plot thickened when a high-ranking official named Haman, angered by Mordecai's refusal to bow to him, concocted a scheme to eradicate all the Jews in Persia. When the king agreed to Haman's murderous plan, the only question remaining was whether Esther could use her position of influence to save her people. That is the situation in chapter 4.

This Week

Read the passage carefully and imagine yourself in Esther's or Mordecai's situation. Let the drama of their crisis wash over you. Try to appreciate the great pressure they felt. And let God use this real-life situation from centuries past to change you today.

-Key Verse-
If you keep silent at this time, liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's house will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."
Esther 4:14 (HCSB)

1 EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage:

Esther 4

1 When Mordecai learned all that had occurred, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, went into the middle of the city, and cried loudly and bitterly.

2 He only went as far as the King's Gate, since the law prohibited anyone wearing sackcloth from entering the King's Gate.

3 There was great mourning among the Jewish people in every province where the king's command and edict came. They fasted, wept, and lamented, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

4 Esther's female servants and her eunuchs came and reported the news to her, and the queen was overcome with fear. She sent clothes for Mordecai to wear so he could take off his sackcloth, but he did not accept them.

5 Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to her, and dispatched him to Mordecai to learn what he was doing and why.

6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the King's Gate.

7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened as well as the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay the royal treasury for the slaughter of the Jews.

8 Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa ordering their destruction, so that Hathach might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and command her to approach the king, implore his favor, and plead with him personally for her people.

9 Hathach came and repeated Mordecai's response to Esther.

10 Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to tell Mordecai,

11 "All the royal officials and the people of the royal provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner courtyard and who has not been summoned—the death penalty. Only if the king extends the gold scepter will that person live. I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the last 30 days."

12 Esther's response was reported to Mordecai.

13 Mordecai told the messenger to reply to Esther, "Don't think that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the king's palace.

14 If you keep silent at this time, liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's house will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."

15 Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

16 "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, day or night. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish."

17 So Mordecai went and did everything Esther had ordered him.

Notes

sackcloth and ashes (v. 1)—an outward sign of inward distress and humiliation; Mordecai realized that he had prompted this genocidal retaliation by Haman

she sent clothes (v. 4)—Mordecai could then enter the king's gate (see 4:2) and talk with Esther directly.

Hathach (v. 5)—a trusted eunuch who knew of Esther's Jewish background

gold scepter (v. 11)—In order to protect the king's life from would-be assassins, this practice prevailed; seemingly, the king would extend the scepter (a sign of kingly authority) only to those whom he knew and from whom he welcomed a visit (see 5:2; 8:4).

last thirty days (v. 11)—Perhaps Esther feared she had lost favor with the king since he had not summoned her recently.

liberation and deliverance (v. 14)—Mordecai exhibited a healthy faith in God's sovereign power to preserve His people. He may have remembered the Lord's promise to Abraham (see Genesis 12:3; 17:1–8).

you ... will be destroyed (v. 14)—Mordecai indicated that Esther because of her prominence, would not escape the sentence or be overlooked (see 4:13).

such a time as this (v. 14)—Mordecai indirectly appealed to God's providential timing.

fast (v. 16)—The text does not mention prayer being included, though surely it was.

DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the following questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

1. What is the significance of sackcloth and ashes? Can you think of any modern-day equivalents for believers in the West? (verses to consider: Genesis 37:34; 2 Kings 19:1; Jeremiah 6:26; Daniel 9:3)
2. What is significant about Mordecai's claim that if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place (verse 14)? (verses to consider: Genesis 17:1–8)
3. Esther's famous words of verse 16 read: "If I perish, I perish." How do these words parallel Jesus' words in John 12:23–26?
4. a) Read Philippians 2:3–4. In what ways did Esther "live out" the truth of this New Testament passage?

b) How might her privileged life in the luxury of the Persian royal palace have altered her values and affected her actions?
5. Is it possible for anyone to serve the cause of Christ without dying? What are some "deaths" a person must experience in order to effectively serve in any ministry?
6. According to Old and New Testament Scripture, why is it important that we engage in spiritual warfare before any and all ministry takes place? (See: Zech. 4:6; Matt. 12:29; Eph. 6:12.)
7. Mordecai essentially reasoned with Esther this way: "Do you think your becoming queen of Persia was a mere fluke? Do you think you can now ignore your heritage and opt only to live a comfortable life? No, there's a reason you've been placed in such an influential position! You need to take careful stock of this situation and use it to the glory of God." If you had a wise old "Cousin Mordecai," what counsel might he give you today as you face your unique life situation?

Sermon Notes:

③LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFEGROUP.

Read Daniel 3 as a group and discuss this question: How is Esther's classic statement of courage, "If I perish, I perish," similar to the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to King Nebuchadnezzar?

30 CORE Competencies

10 Core Beliefs

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation by Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9* I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I live life with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away God's Money *2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away God's money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians 6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 Core Virtues

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, me, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I demonstrate loyalty in my relationships with others in response to God's loyalty to me.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ

10 Core Practices

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33* I focus on God and His priorities for my life.