



“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

by

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“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

—Esther 4:14

Today we will be reading one of the great, great texts of the Bible. I think this passage needs some setting in order to be understood. The scene is the palace at Shushan, which is one of the capitals of the great empire of Persia. You remember that Cyrus and the Medo-Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians and freed the Jews. Now several generations later there are still many, many Jews throughout the empire that did not go back.

Mordecai has a younger cousin by the name of Esther. She is a Jewess and he is a Jew. When Vashti, the queen, refuses to come and display herself before the guests of the king, she is banished from the throne. Esther is chosen in her place as the most beautiful young lady in Persia, (I guess she would be Miss Persia of about 473 B.C.) and she comes to the throne.

The sinister Haman is the prime minister. He has been elevated by the king, Ahasuerus (which is the Hebrew name for Xerxes I), and he has great riches, great power, great pomp. Yet there is one man who will not bow down and do obeisance to him when he passes and that is Mordecai. Haman was not the kind of man to forgive; he wasn’t even the kind of man to get

even. He's going to wipe out the whole race because of that impertinence on the part of Mordecai.

So he inveigles from Xerxes, or Ahasuerus, a decree that all of the Jews in the entire Persian empire should be slaughtered. He does not know, nor does anyone know, that his queen is a Jewess. Safely ensconced in the palace, she is above all of these things. She doesn't even know this happened until Mordecai alerts her to the impending disaster. That is the setting for my message.

Why were you born? That is one of the questions college students wrestle with. Maybe you have, or maybe you have not, heretofore wrestled with it. I have another even more important question for you. Why were you born *again*? Have you ever thought about that? I assure you that our text today will drive you to a consideration thereof.

The time is 490 B.C. The place is a field called Marathon, northeast of Athens by 26 miles. Darius, the king of the vast Persian Empire which stretched all the way from Ethiopia and Egypt to the eastern edges of India, has brought a great army of 180,000 soldiers—the largest army ever amassed—and landed them in Greece, where an army of 11,000 Athenians encountered them.

The generals, realizing that this was going to be a massacre, sent a runner to Sparta to get help. You may be aware of the fact that a runner by the name of Pheidippides ran at the end of this battle, the twenty-six miles from Marathon to Athens, and exclaimed, “Rejoice, we conquered!” and fell dead. (That is where we get the marathon—those twenty-six miles.)

You say, “They must not have been in very good shape in those days. We have thousands of people who run a marathon and don't drop dead—at least most of them don't.” I would. Perhaps you would. You see, before that they had said to the same Pheidippides, who was the fastest runner in the Greek army, that he should run to Sparta to gain help, to bring an army to assist. So Pheidippides took off at full clip to Sparta and at full clip he came back—250 miles. When he got back, the Greeks, who by forming amass, charged into this group that outnumbered them almost 20 to 1 and defeated and routed them. Victory was theirs. While still huffing and puffing, he said to Pheidippides, “Now run to Athens and tell them we won.” They were in pretty good shape back then, but the Persians were defeated.

A decade passes. The date is now 480 B.C. Darius has died and his son Ahasuerus has come to the throne. That is the Hebrew name, but we know him more commonly by his Greek name Xerxes I. Xerxes was still smarting from the defeat his nation and his family and his father had endured. So he gathered together another army, a huge army and a vast fleet of ships, the like of which had never been seen before, (probably was never equaled again until D-Day in World War II.)

These ships set sail against little Greece, and again the Greek navy, vastly outnumbered, charged directly into the middle of them, destroyed half their fleet, and sent them scurrying away. And Xerxes (Ahasuerus) was defeated. His plan was to Persianize Europe. If he had won

the battle, we might all be Zoroastrians, because that is what they were. But God defeated the purpose of that king. He had another purpose.

When the king was inveigled by Haman, his prime minister, to destroy all of the Jews in Persia because Mordecai wouldn't bow down to him, this purpose too—which according to the laws of the Medes (the Persians) could not be changed—God changed. So if Xerxes the king had gotten his way, there would be no Christ because the Jewish race would have been exterminated, and we would be Persian Zoroastrians. But God is the real King and sovereign of this world.

The greatest text in Esther (which name means “star”) clearly falls out into four major points. First, **“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time . . .”** It shows that we may fail God and our duty by doing or saying nothing. Or as St. Ambrose put it: Not only for every idle word must man give an account, but for every idle silence.

DOING AND SAYING NOTHING

Why is it that on so many sides today we are losing the cultural war? It is because of what secular humanists say and do, and what we as Christians don't say and do. Those, of course, are called sins of “omission.” In the long run, what we don't do and don't say may be the things that create the greatest amount of evil in our world. We have been commanded to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature. All we have to do to disobey that is nothing. Say nothing, do nothing, and we are guilty. We are the ones that by default have brought upon our land a flood of unbelief and wickedness.

“If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then . . . what would have happened? The decree had gone out that all of the Jews were to be killed. If Esther had held her peace, the result would have been that all of the Jews would have been killed. No. Read it again. “Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”

GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND WILL USE OTHERS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PURPOSE

Did you ever hear the saying or even the song, “We are the only hands and feet God has”? Question: If that is true, who made our hands and feet? Are we the only lips that God has? Who taught them to speak? Who spoke to Moses from the mountain? Who spoke to Saul, the Pharisee? No, God is the sovereign Lord. If we altogether hold our peace, if we fail God by doing and saying nothing, what will happen: **“Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”** God is sovereign.

There is this humanistic attitude about God that says, in effect, “Poor God. He's trying to do the best He can, but we are the only hands and feet He has, and if we don't speak and do and go, poor God is just not going to get His purposes accomplished. He will go down in history like Xerxes, the man whose purposes were frustrated.” *That is not the God of the Bible.* That is the God of human manufacture. Here is the God of the Bible: “I know that thou canst do all things and that no purpose of thine can be restrained.”

God is not a Ahasuerus. He is the Lord God omnipotent. “Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be restrained.” Our God is in the heavens and He hath done whatsoever

He pleased. **“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).** “I hope, I hope, I hope.” No, God didn’t add that. That is a declaration of finalities: **“It shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”** God’s purposes will be done—if not by us, then by others.

Almost forty years ago when I was in seminary, Dr. Manford George Gutzke, a very famous preacher in his day, was one of my professors. Dr. Gutzke was not too tall. He was very broad, very thick. He was a former heavyweight boxing champion of the Canadian army. He was as bald as a billiard ball, and his hair had migrated to his eyebrows! He had a hand like a ham, and if he dropped it on your head, you would be lying on the ground! But he had the spirit of a cherub . . . a little sweet child.

I have never forgotten what he said one time. This Presbyterian pastor and professor said, “It may be that the Presbyterian church will fail to obey the Great Commission, and if it does, God will raise up others, instead, to do it—for example, the Pentecostals.” Forty years ago, hardly anyone had heard of a Pentecostal. There weren’t that many of them. But, at large, the Presbyterian church failed to fulfill the Great Commission and now the Pentecostals are everywhere throughout the world—exactly as he said.

Help, deliverance, shall come from another source. There are some who will say, “Oh, well, that’s good. I can sit back and forget about it. I don’t have to worry about it anymore. God, just check me out. I’m not going to be involved.”

WE WILL SUFFER LOSS

Well, before you vote yourself out of the game, let me continue the verse: . . . **“but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed.”** The third point is that we will suffer loss. Let me make one thing clear: Every sin we commit, whether of commission or omission, will inevitably involve our suffering loss. I can hear the machinery grinding between some ears. I see smoke coming out. You say, “Wait a minute. Jesus died for my sins, so now I can just do whatever I want, and not do whatever I don’t want to do. Isn’t that right?” No.

“What then shall we say?” said Paul. **“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Romans 6:1, 2)** We have died unto sin that we might live unto Christ. We will suffer loss in this life.

I don’t know what their sins were, but I was listening recently to Chuck Colson talking about the work God is doing in some of the prisons—one of them near Houston, where virtually everybody inmate there has become a Christian. It’s more like a monastery than a prison. Those who minister there have an eighteen month contract to teach prisoners the Word of God. One man, when recently offered parole, wrote a letter which asked respectfully that he be allowed to complete his prison term so he could finish the course. He stayed in prison!

Though a person may have been converted in prison, he still is suffering the loss of his freedom. I have no doubt that there are on Death Row right now numerous people who have

been converted since the committal of their atrocious crimes, and they will, however, lose not only their freedom, but also their lives, as was the case of a celebrated young lady, recently.

But more than that, we shall suffer loss everlastingly and neverendingly in Heaven. In I Corinthians 3 we are told that because we have not served Christ as we should, what we have done will be burnt up, and we shall suffer the loss of those rewards God would be pleased to give to us eternally. Every sin involves our loss. In this case, **“but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed.”** Perhaps it will not be that egregious, but that loss will come and has come in every one of our lives. Every one of our lives is less than what God would be pleased to have it be if we had been faithful to Him.

A CALL FROM GOD

Fourth, and last, every opportunity in this life must be perceived as a call from God. What a great statement this is, when Mordecai says to Esther, **“And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?** Why were you born? Why were you born again? Why were you brought into the Kingdom of God at this time? For what reason? For Esther it was a great crisis for her people. We live in a time of crises. We are, without doubt, in the midst of a great cultural/spiritual war where the forces of darkness are attempting to overwhelm the forces of light and virtue. Whoever is most active and vigilant, as Patrick Henry said, will be the victor in that battle.

How about you? Are you serving in these dark times? I am optimistic that God is going to do something wonderful in the next several decades in this country. I want you to understand that I don’t know that for sure but I believe that it is very possible that if American Christians will wake up, get out of the bleachers and down on the playing field, and get involved, that we can turn this country around. But I don’t know the secret purposes of God. It may be that twenty years from now (I won’t be here to see it, but some of you will), you can look back and see that because the Christians continued in the same kind of apathy they have existed in for decades, the situation in America got worse and worse and worse. As Mrs. Billy Graham said years ago, “Unless America repents, if God does not chasten this country severely, God will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”

We live in a dark time. When a U.S. judge can be sued by the ACLU and threatened with prison for having the Ten Commandments on his courtroom wall, while the President of the United States, if the accusations are true, is engaged in seeing how many of those commandments he can break and get away with—in that kind of a country, darkness has settled very deeply. The most tragic part is that our children are watching and listening and asking questions that no five-year-old ought to be asking at all.

What have you done in the midst of such a time as this? Have you taken a stand against the pornography, against abortion, against the radical homosexual agenda, against the infanticide, against all the various things? Have you written one letter? Have you protested in one march? Have you given a talk? Have you done anything at all?

One little church, taking our booklet “A Hundred and One Things You Can Do To Reclaim American for Christ,” put up a large flag, except it had the red and white stripes and the blue

field, but there were no stars. The people were challenged and each time a person committed themselves to doing one of those things suggested in the booklet to help reclaim America, a star was added to the flag. They had so many weeks to get the fifty stars. A week before the deadline they already had fifty-seven.

I may not be able to do everything, but I can do something, and what I can do, that I will do. The sin of doing nothing at all—that is *the great sin* of the Christian Church. **“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such a time as this*?”**

Think about it, and *do something*!

PRAYER: Father, we thank Thee that when Esther was confronted with this challenge, this beautiful and dear young lady said, in effect, “Pray for me. And in three days, though it is against the law and the price is death, I will go unbidden into the inner court of the king. And if I perish, I perish.” God give us that commitment . . . for such a time as this. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Sermon delivered by Dr. D. James Kennedy on March 1, 1998, at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

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