

For Such a Time as This Esther 4

The book of Esther is a pivotal part of God's history. It is an incredible work of literature, filled with the most stunning and cathartic ironies, constructed with such genius that it rivals the greatest works of Shakespeare, which comes as no surprise when we consider that God Himself is the author of these events. I believe it is a book written for such a time as this. I never tire of saying that we are living in a secularistic, materialistic, humanistic age; a time when God has been largely forgotten.

Richard Dawkins, the famous atheist and author of the book, *The God Delusion*, said, "I am thrilled to be alive at a time when humanity is pushing against the limits of understanding. Even better, we may eventually discover there are no limits." This is the hubristic humanism of our modern day and age. Dawkins truly believes that the unaided human intellect may be unlimited, which is essentially to ascribe to it the qualities which belong only to God. Compare that with what Blaise Pascal, the Christian philosopher of the 17th Century said, "The supreme achievement of reason is to realize that there is a limit to reason."

It is not a sign of the progress of our times that we believe the unaided human intellect may be unlimited. In fact, it is the tragic cause of many of our greatest troubles today. When the human mind is elevated to the place of the divine, disastrous results follow. With science and the human intellect on the throne, humanity is pushing against the limits of understanding, and is unwittingly usurping God by doing so.

Esther shows us how God works in a culture that has nearly lost its sense of connection with God. When God has been abandoned by His people, He does not fully abandon them, but He begins to work behind the scenes. It is a book that shows us, in a very unique way, that there are no coincidences with God. It's been said that coincidences are just God's way of working undercover. God's name is never mentioned

As we study the book of Esther, it's important that we remember why God brought the nation of Israel into being in the first place. We need to keep in mind the bigger picture of God's plan of salvation. The nation of Israel is a miracle. Remember that there wouldn't even have been a nation of Israel if God had not miraculously brought them into being through a nearly hundred-year-old man and his barren, ninety-year-old wife. Why did God call Abram and give him the covenant in the first place? What was God's promise? All the way back in Genesis, God said to Abraham, *"By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."* (Genesis 22:16-18)

That promise in verse 18 is a key to understanding the whole purpose of the Old Testament. "In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." We have it on the Apostle Paul's

authority, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the offspring referred to in this verse is Christ. *“¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.”* (Galatians 3:16) God brought the nation of Israel into being so that the nations would be blessed in his offspring, which Paul says is Christ. Paul is declaring that all the way back in the days of Abraham, God promised that His Son would come into the world. Jesus Christ is the one offspring of Abraham who fulfills every promise of the Old Testament, who possesses the gate of his enemies, and in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, through whom both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God.

With that in mind, we can better understand the importance of the events that are taking place in the book of Esther. We saw last week that a plot was devised against the Jews in the Kingdom of Persia. This is actually a pattern in the Scriptures. From the moment God gave the promise of redemption, the enemy has been trying to put a stop to it. Haman the Agagite is the tool of the enemy in the book of Esther. When he learned that there was one Jew, Mordecai, who refused to bow down to him as the king had commanded, he set in motion a plan to wipe out the whole race. If the plot of Haman was successful, and all the Jews are destroyed, God’s promise would be thwarted. Those are the stakes.

So let’s jump in to chapter 4:

Esther 4:1-3

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ² He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Notice, first of all, that the king of Persia wanted nothing to do with the grief and lamentation of his subjects. He wouldn’t even allow it in his courts. “Don’t bring your sob-stuff in here; this is a place of festivity and joviality.” He was drinking with Haman and had no time for the moribund meddling of his sorrowful vassal serfs. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” What a vain and unloving life to never allow the pains of others to touch you and bring you to grief. What a contrast between this compassionless king and the King of kings, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Far from keeping us out of His courts in our grief, He came down from His courts and entered into our sorrows, He bore them for us in our place, so that we could enter His courts, not with sorrow, but with praise. He turns our mourning into dancing. He trades our sackcloth with royal robes.

Now, the action of tearing one’s clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes was a vivid way of showing the grief that one was experiencing in his heart. Sackcloth was not designed to be worn. It was coarse and rough, and irritated the skin. Ashes, of course, are that which is left behind in the wake of fire’s destruction, and so they were a sign of the sense of ruin and

desolation that one feels in a condition of sin and death. Mordecai and the rest of the Jews were grieving with such intensity because the law of the land had condemned them to death. They were destined for destruction by the authority of their king. It's almost hard to put ourselves in their position, but can you imagine if a law was passed that condemned you and your entire family to death? It's almost unfathomable.

But wait a second, doesn't the law of God do just that? In our relationship to God, we are all children of wrath, destined for destruction. The holy law of God shows us in the clearest possible terms what our problem is. It shows us that we cannot obey our way to God. We are born in a state, a condition, of sin. If we are under the jurisdiction of God's law, we are all condemned.

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

The law gives us the knowledge of our condition—we are born sinners. The law not only gives us the knowledge of sin, it also increases sin. How so? We all understand this because we have all experienced it. The moment a command of God comes to us, our first impulse is to do the very thing which the law forbids. Look at Romans 7:7-8, **⁷ What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."** ⁸ **But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead.** Sin seizes upon the commandment as an opportunity to rebel. That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:56 that the law is the power of sin. Because sin delights in the opportunity for disobedience which the law provides. It feels good to feel like you are above God. It feels like you are free, but you are not. You are a slave to sin when you practice sin.

So the law of God should lead us to grieve as Mordecai grieved when he heard the pronouncement of Haman's edict, because just as that wicked, human edict pronounced death upon all the Jews, so does God's holy law pronounce death upon all of humanity. Do you know what it's like to experience this kind of grief in this world? Faith leads us to grieve over our fallen condition.

The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. What is the shortest verse of the Bible? **"Jesus wept."** (John 11:35) Why did he weep? He wept over the results of our sinful condition. He wept as He stared into the grave of Lazarus, knowing what it would cost Him to defeat death. He knew that He was only a matter of days away from descending down into the depths of the grave Himself, in order to strip it of its power over all of us. By going down into death as the Holy Son of God, He took the sting out of death for all of humanity.

Far from being outdated and irrelevant, the Bible is the most relevant and relatable book in the world. The Scriptures give us the honest truth about ourselves. They give us the full picture of

life after the fall. Until we know what it is to grieve in the presence of God, we have not understood the revelation of God's Word.

Returning to the text,

⁴ When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. (Esther 4:4)

Esther, being ignorant of the king's edict, tries something that we have all tried to do in our lives, which is to superficially cover our grief. She didn't want Mordecai to be undignified in his grief, so she sent him clothes. She had good intentions, but her efforts were futile. Mordecai could not be clothed until the condemnation brought upon him and his people was overturned.

This attempt to send garments to clothe Mordecai reminds me of what Adam and Eve did when they realized their nakedness in the Garden of Eden when sin entered the world. They sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves. They tried to cover the shame of their sin with garments of their own making. We've all done this. We try to hide our guilt. We put on disguises, often convincing ourselves that we are alright. Often, we try to cover one another..” We are always very busy trying to fix one another. We cannot fix one another. There is only one who can fix what is broken in the human soul. Only God can atone for our guilt, and cover our shame and nakedness. Jesus Christ alone can fix us. We must not accept any other garments but the robe of righteousness offered by Jesus Christ, who redeemed us by becoming a curse for us.

¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:13-14)

Like Mordecai refusing the garments Esther offered, have you refused the garments this world offers you? Self-righteousness will not do. You can't clothe yourself, and nobody else can clothe you. You must fly to the cross and wholly lean on Jesus' name. He alone can cover your guilt and clothe you in a righteousness which will not put you to shame in the presence of God.

Returning to our text,

⁵ Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷ and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on

behalf of her people. ⁹ And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹ “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.” (Esther 4:5-11)

Now Esther understands the problem, and she just so happens to be in a position to do something about it. This orphan girl is now the one in a position to go to the king on behalf of God's people. But it won't be without great risk to herself. It was a capital crime to go into the presence of this king without being summoned. Esther would now have to decide if she was willing to face death in order to intercede for her people, God's chosen nation.

Does this plot sound familiar? Can you think of anyone else who had to face death in order to intercede for God's people? Is it merely coincidence that the events of this history are filled with shadows of what Christ would do for His people hundreds of years later? There are no coincidences with God. Jesus Christ not only had to face the risk of death to intercede for us and free us from the curse of God's law, He was delivered up to death according the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. He had to die to save us. If he had not died, we would have no way of going into the presence of the Father. The veil that separated the people from the Shekinah glory of God in the Temple would have remained, and we would still be in our sins. But that was not the will of the Father. It was God's will that Christ should suffer for us, and so rend the veil that separates us from God.

Esther is in a difficult position. It will require great faith and courage to appear before the king and bring her request on behalf of her people. Her only hope of success is the grace of the king and not his law. The law would render her guilty in his presence, but if he extends his grace, she and her people could be saved.

¹² And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³ Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

This is perhaps the most famous statement made in the book of Esther, and for good reason. It is a powerful witness to the Providence of God. We all ought to face this question throughout our lives. “Who knows whether you have not come to this place for such a time as this?” Perhaps you are here tonight, listening to the word of God, for such a time as this. The question implies the reality that there is no such thing as random chance in this world. What has become the common understanding of the cosmos today—that all is a result of random chance and billions and billions of years—is leveled to the ground by the God-controlled events of the book of Esther, and of all the Scriptures everywhere. Again, there are no coincidences with God. Everything has a purpose. Everything happens according to God's perfect timing.

Jesus understood this principle more clearly than any other human being who has ever lived. Have you ever noticed how often He spoke of the plan of His Father, and of His Father's timing. Paul tells us that Jesus came in the fulness of time. (Galatians 4:4) He means at exactly the right moment—right when God planned that He should come from before the foundations of the earth, that's when He came. Jesus said, *The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.*" (John 5:20)

Jesus, as the eternally-begotten Son of God, who is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, had the special, unique privilege of knowing the Father's will in advance. He knew what was to be His hour. He referred to it quite often throughout His life on this earth. Whenever He spoke of His hour, He was speaking of the cross. He didn't have to wonder whether or not He had come to the world for such a time as this; He knew precisely the time for which He had been born. In John 12, He said,

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:23-24) Then He said, *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'"* (John 12:27-28)

How did Jesus' death bring glory to the Father's name? Because it brought us all to God! The Bride of Christ, the Church, the praising assembly of the saints, who will sing praise to the Father for endless ages, was purchased by the blood of Christ. The Father did this for us for the ultimate purpose of glorifying His name. O mystery of mysteries! The cross of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God for those who are being saved.

Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all

We, because we are not God like Jesus is, do not have the privilege of the foreknowledge of God's plan. But we do have the revelation of what God has done, and we know what God calls us to do in the light of what He has done. He calls us to come boldly into His presence, not on account of our good deeds, but on account of the cross of Jesus Christ. He says that if we trust in the cross, and only in the cross, then we are children of God. The Father holds out His golden scepter, Jesus Christ, to you, and He invites you to come into His throne room with boldness.

Watch how Esther responds.

¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther is a great example of how we trust in the Lord. Faith does not mean that we simply sit by and let God do everything. It doesn't mean that we don't have any part to play in God's plans. Quite the opposite, in fact. Faith means that we are actively involved in God's plans. It's like the people of Israel walking across the bottom of the Red Sea. The waters parted, and the people had to walk through. They had to trust that God was going to hold that water up for them until they got through to the other side. They had to step out into the midst of the sea saying, "If I perish, I perish." It's like Abraham leaving his home behind and venturing off into an unknown place that God had promised to him and his offspring.

Faith means venturing into the promises of God. Esther made up her mind that she was going to go to the king to intercede for her people, even if it cost her life. In doing so, she was becoming an active participant in the God's drama of redemption. She was stepping into the role God had prepared for her in preserving the nation of Israel, just as He had promised He would.

What about you? Have you ventured into the promises of God? I'm reminded of the hymn, "Standing on the promises of God."

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God, my Savior;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

You know that the Son of God came down from heaven to perish for you, so that you don't have to perish. He didn't say, "If I perish, I perish." He said, "I will perish." He said, "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*" (Luke 9:22) He had to do that because otherwise we would all still be condemned under the law of God, destined for hell. But when He perished for us, He took our punishment, He bore our sins, He redeemed us from the curse of the law. So the promise of God is "*Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*" (John 3:16)