

## GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (January 1, 2023)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

2022 becomes 2023. For many of us New Year's Day is a day to reflect on the past year's experiences, relationships, sorrows, joys, decisions, loves. It's also a time to look forward. We make plans, promises, pledges for the months ahead. Not all of our plans and promises go as we'd hoped. Only 36% of those who make a New Year's resolution are still at it a month later. Even worse ... only 9% of resolutionists (I made that word up) make it to the finish line. I believe the greatest hope of the New Year is the hope for new beginnings, fresh starts, forgiveness. Christians believe God wrote that longing for new beginnings, for forgiveness, into the very fabric of our lives. His gift of love makes peace and forgiveness possible: peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with others. Not once a year, but every day, every hour, every minute. This morning my dear friend Mark Bassett (pastor in Ephrata) returns. He will be leading you through the life of a Queen named Esther. Her entire family, and her nation, were scheduled to die because of a law written due to pride and hatred. She would take a risk, speak up, even though it could have cost her everything, and in so doing, trusting God, she and her nation were given a new beginning.

### **Three Parts: The Story, The Silence, The Savior** (Esther 4)

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. <sup>10</sup>Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, <sup>11</sup>'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.'

<sup>12</sup>And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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?' <sup>15</sup>Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, <sup>16</sup>'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.' <sup>17</sup>Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."

### **What DOES IT SAY?**

1. Why was Mordecai so troubled?
2. What was Queen Esther's initial response to Mordecai?

### **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

3. What does it mean to wear "sackcloth and ashes"?
4. Why was Esther willing to take a risk, "If I perish, I perish"?
5. Why did Queen Esther ask others to "fast"?

### **WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?**

6. Have you ever been in so much trouble you couldn't see a way out? Discuss how you felt when in the middle of the trouble.
7. What would you have done if you were in Esther's situation?
8. What would you be willing to risk your life for? Give details.
9. Have there been times when you believe God has placed you in a particular place/role for "such a time as this"?

As you spend time praying remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural, easy, and empowering, part of your day. Prayer is talking to God, and God talking to you. Ask God to give you both courage and love to risk your safety, even life, if needed. Pray for those who seek your harm. God will help you because He loves you.