

Thus far, we've seen how the plot's been unfolding in the book of Esther. And now the tension is here. The tension is getting tense. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm thinking, oh boy, things have gotten serious. The villain of our story, Haman, has, for all intents and purposes, succeeded.

He has successfully convinced the king that the Jews, God's people, are a threat to his kingdom, and so has been given a blank check, and he used that blank check to write a decree, a decree that would dispel the destruction of the entire Jewish people, and with the destruction of the Jewish people would be the destruction of the promise of Jesus. Because Jesus has not come yet. Jesus, these are his great, great grandparents. So, no Jewish people, no Jesus, no salvation.

We can only guess, but it's not much of a guess. This is Satan's work. Satan, as from the very beginning, from Genesis 3, the seed of the serpent is moving against the seed of the woman, trying to destroy it. And all hope appears to be lost. Except there's something that Haman doesn't know. God has a man on the inside, or rather a woman on the inside.

That's what we're gonna read about today. So let's read this text together. Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Father in heaven, as we open your word, we pray that what we know not, you'd teach us. What we have not, give us. and where we are not, make us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Reading from Esther chapter four, beginning at verse one through chapter five, verse eight.

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. And he went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes. Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish, and she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, that he might remove his sackcloth from him. But he did not accept them.

Then Haman summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. So Hathak went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him all that had happened to him. and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict, which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her and to order her to go to the king and to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people. Hathor came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther. Then Esther spoke to Hathak and ordered him to reply to Mordecai.

All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for 30 days. They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place. And you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this.

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, go. Assemble all the Jews who are to be found in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast in the same way. And thus, I will go to the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Now, it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room opposite the entrance of the palace. When the king saw Esther, the queen, standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight, and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter.

Then the king said to her, What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half my kingdom it shall be done to you. Esther said, If it please the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I shall prepare for him. Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, and we will do as Esther desires. So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, what is your petition?

For it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half my kingdom, it shall be done. So Esther replied, my petition and my request is, if I have found favor in your sight, in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I requested, may the king and Haman come to the banquet, which I shall prepare for them tomorrow. as the king says.

This is the word for Lord. May he add his blessing to it. Throughout this series on the book of Esther, we've talked a lot about God's providence, how God is in control regardless of our circumstances. We saw from the very beginning how God is in control even in the highest reaches of power, even the highest courts of the land, even when they're incompetent, selfish, or wicked. And we've seen how God is in control, how God is providentially working out good for his people, even when they sin. Doesn't excuse sin, but it does give us hope. If you've sinned, your life isn't over. God can still use it for your good. You haven't destroyed God's plan. We've also seen, in our last sermon on Esther, how God is at work even in the plans of his greatest enemies. How God was at work even in the plans of Haman. How God was at work even in the plans of Satan at Calvary.

And all this talk about God's providence with it begs a bit of a question. Well, if God is sovereign, if God is truly in control of all things, Does that mean that there's nothing left for me to do? Does that mean that I can sit back and just kind of kick back in my Christian life, lay on my laurels and say, you know, God's going to do what God's going to do. Whatever will be, will be, a sera sera, whatever will be, will be.

In other words, does God's providence mean our passivity? Does God's providence mean our passivity? Well, in this passage, we're going to learn that it's actually the exact opposite. God's providence does not encourage, does not excuse laziness. God's providence actually encourages his people to be active. God's providence encourages his people to be active.

Now, we'll be looking at this passage under four major headings. The first one is a double danger, a double danger. Look with me. Chapter 4, verse 1. We've seen this decree that Haman has brought against the Jews, that every single one of them will be slain a year after the decree is published. And how does Mordecai, the Jew, one of our heroes, respond to this news? Chapter 4, verse 1.

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out in the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. What you see Mordecai doing here is less a result of fear and more a result of mourning. The idea of putting sackcloth and ashes on in the ancient world was not something you did because you were afraid. It was something you did because you were mourning something. It was often done at funerals.

What Mordecai is doing, he's symbolizing he is so sure this danger that's coming on the Jewish people is so sure to happen from their perspective. It's so ominous. The Persian government is so powerful that it's as if the Jewish people are already dead. This danger is great. And Mordecai is not alone in coming to this conclusion.

Look at verse three. In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many were on sackcloth and ashes. So the people of God all throughout, wherever this decree goes, are mourning. But notice, they're not just mourning. The text also mentions that they are fasting. Fasting. Why are they fasting?

Well, if you'll remember from our very first sermon on the book of Esther, we talked about how Esther is a stylistic work. It's not just bare history. There's a style to it. There's some literary artistry here. And one of the things that is unique about the book of Esther is it never mentions the God by name. It never mentions his actions by name. It never even talks about prayer specifically. Why?

Well, because the writer of Esther wants the reader of the book to see that God is at work even when you can't see it. God is always at work in the background. If you look for providence, you will find it. And that is true in the book of Esther. Even though God's name is not mentioned, even though prayer is not mentioned, God is obviously at work. And this is one of those examples. It talks here about fasting. Fasting is almost always connected in the Bible with prayer.

So God's people, they're not just mourning their demise. They haven't given up all hope. They are appealing to the one person who can save them. Haman might be the highest official in the land, but there is someone higher, and they're appealing to him. Now, while the rest of God's people may think Haman is the highest in the land and there's no one else they can appeal to but God, Mordecai knows something everyone else doesn't.

Mordecai knows about his cousin, his adoptive daughter. She's the queen of Persia. And so he thinks, well, maybe I should talk to her. Maybe she can do something. And so what does Mordecai do in verse two? He went as far as the king's gate. Why is he going to the king's gate? He's gotta get Esther's attention. He's gotta talk to Esther. But he can't get into the king's gate. Why? For no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth." In other words, this is meant to be kind of funny.

What do we know about King Ahasuerus' court? It's like, it's basically like a college frat house. It's constant party. Constant drinking parties. That's what they do in Ahasuerus' court. And just as in most of those places, you don't want to be a buzzkill. No buzzkills allowed is basically what's going on the door there. We don't want anyone in here with this mourning, this crying, this sackcloth, this ashes. No, that'll kill the vibe.

This is a happy place. This happy, clappy palace, we don't want any of that mourning or sadness in here. Incidentally, there's a warning here for churches. A warning here because There are many churches that the unspoken rule is that church is the happy, clappy place. Church is not a place to be sad. Church is a place to be happy. You take your sadness somewhere else, you take your tears somewhere else, you come to church, put a smile on your face, and you act as though everything's fine. Now, praise God. Now, praise God.

I would do not think that is true of Second Presbyterian Church. I think that we do a fairly good job at welcoming, at understanding suffering and allowing for it. But just because we're doing that so far doesn't mean we can't fall into this mentality. We need to be reminded. There is a time to laugh. There is also a time to weep. God's people are not immune from suffering. We suffer all the time.

And we need to have a place for that. There's a place for Psalm 104. we read this morning of rejoicing before God, there's also a place for Psalm 22, isn't there? A place to mourn. Well, there was no place for mourning in the palace of Ahasuerus, so Mordecai can't get in at the gate.

However, a high official in the land of Persia, in sackcloth, weeping and wailing in the court, is bound to get people's attention. And so luckily, Luckily, word gets to Esther through the grapevine. Look at verse four. Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish, and she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. So Esther hears that, hey, Mordecai, that Chi official, he's out weeping and wailing in the court.

And so she's terrified. She thinks, what could be happening? Why is he weeping and wailing? Why is he wearing sackcloth? And she wants to talk to him. But of course, she can't violate the rule, so she sends out some clothes to clothe Mordecai so he can come in and he can tell her what's going on in private. But notice, Mordecai does not accept these clothes.

Why? I mean, after all, his whole purpose in coming there is to talk to Esther. Why wouldn't he take off his mourning clothes just to go and talk to her? Well, I think there's a couple of reasons. One, Mordecai wants to emphasize to Esther just how serious this is. Esther, I can't just take off my mourning clothes. I can't just remove these ashes. This is serious. There's another reason, though.

Mordecai does not want to break solidarity with God's people. Remember, who else is mourning? Is it just Mordecai mourning? No, all of God's people are mourning. All of God's people are fasting. All of God's people are in sackcloth. And Mordecai probably thinks, I can't put on my royal robes. I can't walk into the happy, clappy place and pretend as though everything's fine, because it's not. I am not a Persian. I am a Jew. I am one of God's people, and God's people are in mourning. And I will not act as though everything's okay.

And so since Esther can't get the word to Mordecai, because Mordecai won't put on the mourning clothes, won't come into the palace, Esther obviously can't go out herself. I mean, if the queen leaves the palace and goes to talk to a guy in sackcloth in the court, well, that could reveal that they're related. And Esther right now wants to keep that a secret. No one at this point knows Esther is related to Mordecai, and Esther wants to keep it that way.

So what does she do? She sends a trusted messenger. Look at verse 5. Then Esther summoned Hathak from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. So Hathak went out to the Mordecai, to the city square in front of the king's gate.

Notice also, Esther has no idea what's going on. Esther is so cloistered in the palace that she doesn't even know about the decree that Haman has put out against the Jews. Esther is so entrenched in the Persian culture, in the Persian court, she doesn't know what's going on with the people of God.

Remember, ever since Mordecai had told her to hide her Jewishness, to pretend to be a Persian, that's what she's been doing. She has been alienating that part of her life, probably for about six or seven years now. She might care about Mordecai, but for all intents and purposes, she's been a Persian over these past years. Well, the word gets to Mordecai. Look at what Mordecai says.

And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him and the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the edict, which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her and to order her to go to the king and to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people. Mordecai sends this message to Esther, shows her the danger of this decree, how it's imminent, how it's going to mean the destruction of all the Jewish people. And then he asks Esther, hey, go to the king, plead for your people. What is Mordecai asking here? Well, Mordecai is asking Esther to go to the king.

First of all, tell him you lied to him. You've been lying to him for the past six years. Ever from the first day you met me, I've been lying to you about my heritage. Not only that, I'm actually a part of that hated people that you have just ordered the destruction of. Oh, and by the way, I also want you to reverse a decree, a very public decree that you just made.

Now, if Vashti was deposed for not coming when the king called her, what chance does Esther have? Moreover, think about who is asking this. This is Mordecai. Wasn't Mordecai the one who told Esther to hide her Jewishness, to pretend to be a Persian for the past six years, all to protect her from a danger that might have happened? And

now when the very clear and present danger is here, now he wants her to go? What's happened to Mordecai? What we talked about from the beginning, Mordecai and Esther are not flat characters.

They are round characters. They develop. Something has changed in Mordecai. God has been changing Mordecai. God has put Mordecai in a position where he has to choose to either embrace the destruction of himself and all of his people or to put his beloved daughter into God's hands for her safety, just as he should have done from the beginning. From the beginning, he should have put Esther's safety in God's hands, but he didn't. Now, God, now, God has forced Mordecai into a position where he must do that. God's at work. This is pretty cool. So, this word gets to Esther. Esther's probably somewhat confused by it.

I mean, after all, what in the world? Aren't you the one that's been telling me to hide my Jewishness all this time? Didn't you command me to do that? I've been doing what you say, and now that it's gotten dangerous, now you want me to do something about it? But that's not the only danger. The danger gets even worse. The author raises the stakes. Look at verse 10.

Then Esther spoke to Hathak and ordered him to reply to Mordecai. All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king, to the inner court, who is not summoned, He has but one law, that he is to be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he might live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these past 30 days. Esther says, don't you know the law? Don't you know that anyone who comes to the king uninvited is liable to be executed?

Herodotus actually speaks about this in his history of the Persian Empire. He says there were seven princes that had immediate access to the court of the king. Anyone else comes to the king, they would normally be executed unless the king decided to grant clemency, to grant mercy. You didn't just walk in to see the king of Persia.

So obviously there's the danger, but also Esther says she's in no position to talk to the king right now. He hasn't asked for me in 30 days. Esther hasn't even seen the king for a month. Yes, Esther may have at one time been the great favorite, been the one that he was delighted with, the one he'd given the crown, but if we know anything about Ahasuerus, he is not a man, he is a wishy-washy kind of guy.

We get evidence of that all the way back in chapter two. Look back at chapter two, Chapter 2, verse 19. When the virgins were gathered together for the second time. This is after Esther has been crowned queen. What did the king do? He gathered more virgins. Why? He wanted a bigger harem. You think that the king had been sleeping alone these past 30 days? He had not. Esther had once been the favorite. Not so much anymore.

So this is very much a double danger. There's the danger of the decree coming down on the Jewish people, but what Esther is being asked to do is also incredibly dangerous. So this double danger pressing in on Esther leads to our second major point, a decisive moment, a decisive moment.

So how does Mordecai respond to this message from Esther? What does he say? Look at verse 12. They related Esther's words to Mordecai. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther. Do not imagine that you and the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place. The first thing Mordecai does is he reminds Esther of God's sovereignty. Esther, God is on the throne. If you choose not to act, if you choose not to intervene, God is still going to keep his promise.

Mordecai had read Genesis 3. He'd read about the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. God's not going to go back on that. He'd read Genesis 12, the promise made to Abraham. through your descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. He'd read Deuteronomy, that God will not utterly destroy his people, even in their exile. He will one day raise up a prophet for them like Moses. He'd read the covenant God made with David, that he would not lack a son on the throne.

God's promises would be fulfilled. God is still on the throne. God is sovereign. But notice what else he says. Verse 13, verse 14 rather. Relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place, and you and your father's house will perish. Now some see here a threat from Mordecai. That doesn't make any sense in this context. Mordecai loves his daughter dearly. We know that from everything else we know about Mordecai, so what's he saying here? What's Mordecai saying? Well, Mordecai is detecting a moment of decision here for Esther.

He's saying, God is sovereign. God is also just. God is just. And if you abandon your people in this moment, if you continue to identify as a Persian, if you continue to stay in your palace and act as though you're not involved, that's not safety. That is destruction, either in this life or in the next. You will pay for that. God is not mocked.

Friends, there comes a moment when someone is raised in a Christian home, when they've left home, when they have to decide, are they going to identify with the world or are they going to identify with God's people? Are they gonna identify with what's around them? What looks safe? Or are they going to take up their cross and follow Jesus?

Just because you're a covenant child doesn't necessarily mean you're gonna make the right choice. We pray you do. We pray that you're one of God's elect, that God will draw you to himself. But that doesn't remove the realness of that decision. It's a real decision. There comes that time. It's that time for Esther. Esther must understand that God is not mocked.

So as Mordecai reminds her of God's sovereignty, he reminds her of God's justice. And third, he reminds her of God's providence. His providence. Look again at verse 14. Relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place, and you and your father's house will perish.

And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this. For such a time as this. Notice, Mordecai does not view God's sovereignty as an excuse for passivity. Mordecai doesn't say, Esther, don't worry about it actually. God's going to keep his promise. God will protect his people. God is going to keep his promise to Abraham regardless of what we do. Therefore, we can do nothing. Therefore, Esther, you can sit on their laurels. You

can protect yourself. Keep pretending to be a Persian. You'll be fine. This will blow over and we'll be okay. No, he doesn't say that.

Because Mordecai understands that God does decree whatever comes to pass, but he also decrees the means. Mordecai understands that God is sovereign, God is in control. Therefore, we ought to obey, trusting that God will use our obedience for his glory, will use our obedience to fulfill his plans. Mordecai tells Esther, look at how unlikely it is that you're on the throne.

Look at the fact, this is a rags to riches story. You were once an orphan, and now you are queen of the most powerful nation on earth. That is not an accident. You've been given an opportunity here. God has placed you here for a reason. How about your life? What position has God put you in? Do you look at your own life? and say, perhaps for such a time as this, that coworker, that job, that family member, that person you meet on the street next to you pumping gas, God may have placed you there for such a time as this.

Friends, God's sovereignty, God's providence is motivation for you to be active. It's motivation for you to do. It is motivation for you for you to engage to be obedient to God. What does Paul say about this? Paul says, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work within you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God's providence encourages our activity.

That's what Mordecai wants Esther to know. Esther, you need to step up. Why? Because God is sovereign. Because God is at work. He's placed you here for a reason. I'm really getting to like Mordecai. I don't know about you. He's kind of grown into himself. Do you see the role he's taking on here? He's now taking on the role of the spiritual father. The spiritual father he should have been from the beginning.

Remember before he told Esther, hide your Jewishness, hide your aspect of being a people of God. Just lay low. Pretend to be a Persian and you'll be safe. He was a negative influence on Esther. Now what's he doing? He is being the true spiritual father that she needs. Encouraging her, teaching her. How does Esther respond to this?

Well, look at verse 15. Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, go. Assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. And I and my maidens will also do the same. And thus I will go to the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went and did just as Esther has commanded him. A few things I want you to notice about Esther's response. First, there was a reliance on God.

Again, the mention of fasting, and not just any kind of fasting. A lot of fasts still allow you to drink water. Esther says no food, no drink for three days. Most fasts allowed you to eat or drink at night, but not during the day. Not this fast. This is night and day. Esther wants her and the Jewish people to devote all their energies, all their time over these three days, pouring out themselves to God, asking for his mercy, asking them to bless her plans. There's a reliance on God. There's also community solidarity. The people of God fast, Esther and her maidens fast. For once, Esther is identifying with the people of God, not the Persians. Third, imperfect faith. Notice what Esther says, if I perish, I perish.

Doesn't sound as sure. as we might like. I mean, we keep thinking of the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right? God is able to deliver us from this fire, but even if he doesn't, we won't bow down. That's what we aspire to, right? That's the kind of faith we all desire. We wish the Holy Spirit would continue to make alive in us, right? But most of the time, our faith doesn't look like that, does it? Most of the time, our faith looks more like Esther's. If I perish, I perish. But the good news is that God can use a Daniel faith, a Shadrach, Meshach, and a Bendigo faith. He can also use an Esther faith.

That's why Jesus told the story of faith the size of a mustard seed. Jesus isn't saying, all right, you just gotta work really hard, maybe you can get up to a mustard seed, then you can start to do some cool stuff. That's not the point. Jesus' whole point is that even if you have just a tiny little bit of faith, you can do amazing things, not because the faith is so potent, Because the one in whom your faith is placed is potent. He is powerful. Six inches of ice will hold you up on a lake, whether you tiptoe across or run across. That's what faith in God is like.

So we see here this moment of decision from Esther. And this leads to a practical plan, a practical plan. Look at verse one of chapter five. Now it came about in the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms. And the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room opposite the entrance of the palace. Notice Esther's approach here. Esther first puts on her royal robes, the symbol of her authority. She is the queen of Persia.

Second, notice that she doesn't barge in. She doesn't run in, interrupt the king's business, and start making demands. She's wise. She's prudent. Instead, she sticks to the back of the room and waits for the king to notice her. There's a lot of wisdom here, and the wisdom continues on.

We see that her approach ends up winning her some favor with the king. Look at verse two. When the king saw Esther, the queen, standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight, and the king extended to Esther the royal scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter.

Can you imagine the sigh of relief she would have internally? Okay, step one complete. I'm not dead. This is good. But more than that, I think there would have been something else in the back of her mind. How unlikely is it that the king would receive me this kindly? This isn't just because I was being prudent. God has heard our prayers. God is going to save us. And so that emboldens her. Look at verse three. Then the king said to her, What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request?

Even to half my kingdom it shall be done. Esther said, If it please the king, may the king and Haman come this day to a banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, and that we may do as Esther desires. So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. And as they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, what is your petition?

And it will be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half my kingdom, it shall be done. So Esther replied, my petition and my request is, if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleased the king to grant my

petition and do as I request, then may the king and Haman come to the banquet, which I shall prepare for them. And tomorrow I will do as the king says. Now, I don't know about the rest of you, I'm getting a little bit tense as I'm reading this. I'm thinking, Esther, what are you doing? You got his favor. He just offered you half the kingdom. Why aren't you making your request? What's going on?

Well, again, Esther is using some wisdom here. First, there's two aspects to the wisdom. First, you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Esther's trying to butter him up. Ahasuerus is the kind of guy that's very susceptible to influence. And when a pretty girl keeps inviting you over for supper and wants to spend time with you, that can really pump up your ego. There's something to that. But there's another aspect to it, too. This part is really genius, honestly. Look at the way that she phrases her second request. In verse 8. Verse 7 and 8, rather.

My petition of my request is, if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if the king If it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, then may the king and Haman come to the banquet. In other words, Esther is tying the king's acquiescence to her request with his attendance at the banquet. Esther is saying, hey, my request is come tomorrow, and if you come, I'll be expecting that you're willing to do what I request. It's really sly, honestly.

This leads us to another point about providence. Providence doesn't always mean a trust in God's providence. Obedience to God doesn't always mean walking around Jericho and blowing a trumpet. Obedience to God doesn't always mean doing the illogical, unwise thing. Most of the time, it means doing the logical, wise thing. Jesus said to his disciples, I send you out as sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Jesus wants us to be wise. He wants us to execute wisdom.

If you have a burden on your heart, if you believe that God is calling you to do something, that doesn't mean that you do it recklessly. It means employ your wisdom. Employ the resources God has given you. Think it through. Make a good plan. Do it, yes. But don't believe that because you decide to do it wisely, because you take some time to plan, you're being disobedient, you're not. God's providence often works through our wisdom, works through our executing it to the best of our ability, just as it did with Esther. So this is where we have to leave Esther for now. I mean, things are looking better than they were at the end of last chapter, but there's still some tension, right?

What's the king gonna say? I mean, Ahasuerus is the kind of guy that could flip on a dime. What could happen over the next 24 hours? He could become angry with her. Will Esther's identifying with her people result in her death or the salvation of her people?

You know, there was another man, another person that faced a similar decision. But he didn't face it in a nice palace. He faced it in a garden. And for him, it wasn't a choice between probable death to save God's people and apathy. It was certain death. And that man's name was Jesus. As Jesus cried out in the garden, Lord, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet what else did he say?

Let not my will. but thy will be done. Jesus chose to endure the cross, despising the shame. Why? To save us, not from an unjust decree written by a maniac, but from a just decree, the decree of the curse of sin. A decree that goes all the way back to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned against God and rightfully merited death, both for themselves and all their descendants, us included. But then Jesus came, and Jesus came, and he took on that

death that we deserve. He bore the wrath, not of a wicked tyrant, but of God Almighty, purchasing for us salvation, so that all who call on his name cannot simply avoid his wrath, but call him Father. That is the great God we serve. And it is that God that is at work and who calls you to work.

Not in your own strength, but in the strength he provides. Not to passivity, but to activity. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you are sovereign. That as we look at the world around us, as we look at our own lives, we can know they are not random. We're not in the places we are. and the jobs we have, the friends we have, the places we are, the co-workers we have, none of it is in vain. None of it is random.

It is all according to your will. And you have a calling on all of us. Lord, I pray you give us the grace, give us, show us by your Holy Spirit where you might be calling us to be active, to serve you. Show us, Lord, the places where we can say, Perhaps this was for such a time as this. Help us, Father, to never forget the suffering that you endured for our salvation, for that opportunity. We ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.