

I Will Go
The Queen
Esther 4:1-17

February 25, 2024

HDBC

For the last two sermons in this series, we are going to turn a bit of a corner. They will focus on different individuals but will have similarities. Both were called to step into situations that involved great personal risk. Both showed great courage in answering the call to go. One is a woman. The other a man. They lived centuries apart and lived in different regions of the world. One was in a royal family. The other was in the ministry. One was called to intercede and the other to confront.

If you thrive on the adrenal that comes with taking risks, you will love serving Jesus. For He will sometimes call us to go into risky and dangerous situations. The Bible is full of examples. **Noah, David, Elijah, Peter**, to name a few.

This morning let's think about Esther. Her story is one of the most complex in the entire Bible. She was called to go into a dangerous situation in order to intercede on behalf of others who were in danger. She could have remained silent and possibly been safe. But she was unwilling to stand by and watch innocent people be killed. She was willing to step into the battle and stand up to a bully when it would have been easy to turn a blind the other way.

Parents, I want to encourage you to teach your kids to stand up to bullies. Not only those who bully them, but also to those who bully others. In every school there are kids who are picked on and bullied. Teach your kids to stand in the gap for them. Pray that they will do so. **Before I ever started writing this sermon or had even decided for sure that I would preach it this week, I prayed for my grandchildren. Among other things I prayed . . .**

For them to be protected from evil influences

For them to do well in their studies

For them to be protected from bullies

For them to stand up for those who are bullied

I'm very aware that it is risky to do so, and they may suffer for it. But I pray they will learn early in life that some risks are worth it. I don't want them to develop a habit of simply turning a deaf ear and a blind eye when they see others being picked on. **Esther was faced with this reality and rose to the occasion.**

The setting: 5th cent. B.C. Israel had been swallowed up by the powerful Persian empire. Many Hebrews had been taken far to the east, near the capital of Susa.

Four key characters:

1. The King - Ruler of the empire.
2. Haman - One of king's chief rulers. Arrogant, selfish, and had no conscience.
3. Mordecai - Hebrew living in the area.
4. Esther - Mordecai's, young cousin, more like an adopted daughter

The backstory: The king threw a party. 7 days in he asked his wife to come and entertain the male guests by showing them her beauty. She refused. The king was furious. Men all over the region got nervous, thinking their wives would see this a sign that they all could disobey their husbands. This was a real concern. Seems comical to us. The disobedient queen would have to be punished. She was stripped from her position as queen.

Months later the king was a sad and lonely. He missed the queen. His advisors encouraged him to find a new queen. Beauty contest to select the next queen. Most beautiful virgins would be called in and prepared to meet the king. A young Hebrew girl named Esther was selected. **They did not know she was Jewish.** He would ultimately make his choice from this group. After a long and complex process, she was selected to become the new queen. So far so good.

In the meantime, a rivalry developed between Mordecai and one of the King's most trusted rulers, Haman. Mordecai refused to honor Haman, and it drove him crazy. He decided to get rid of Mordecai. Rather than only getting rid of Mordecai he decided to get rid of all who were like Mordecai, the Jews. He tricked the king into signing an edict, condemning the Jews to be killed on a particular day of a particular month. As you might imagine, the Hebrew people were in a state of shock and grief. Something would have to be done.

This brings us to the events of chapter four.

1. The Anguish of the Hebrews (1-3)

Mordecai reacted as you might imagine. He was torn apart on the inside, and he expressed it in the culturally accepted ways on the outside. Tore his clothes put on sackcloth and covered himself in ashes. He went through the city expressing this anguish even outside the gates of the kings palace. Equivalent to being just outside the fence surround the White House. This same kind of expression of anguish went on in all the areas where the Jews lived.

The Jewish people have always been a special target of Satan. Why?

Because they were the people whom God chose to be the people through whom the Word would be written, and through whom the Messiah would be born. Generation after generation the Jews have had to withstand radical attempts to annihilate them as a people. They have been the recipients of more genocidal attacks in history than any other people. It is happening again in our day. **Do you wonder what you might have done if you had lived in Germany in the 1930s? Pay attention to what you are doing now. We must speak and act in defense of the Jewish people. Just a few days ago there was a parade of antisemites carrying Nazi flags in the city of Nashville.** We must speak out against this madness.

2. The Opportunity to Intervene (4-14) don't read the text

Word was brought to Esther of Mordecai's action. She was dumbfounded. She had no idea of the decree that would result in the death of Mordecai and of all her people. She had not been brought into that information loop.

So, she sent a message, asking Mordecai what was going on. When he received the message, he quickly responded. He explained the new law that required the death of all Hebrews. He even sent her a copy of the text of the law. Then he dropped a hint of what Esther should do. She and only she had the power, position and opportunity to get to the ear of the king and persuade him to change his mind. But there was a problem with that. Listen to the words she sent back to Mordecai. **Read verse 11-12.** That was a problem.

She could go to see the king, but there was no guarantee that he would even accept her into his room. If he did not, it would mean her death. At least for a brief time it seems that she was unsure of what to do. She hesitated and expressed her thoughts to Mordecai. His quick and insightful response gave her the courage and conviction she needed. Listen to his words. **Read 13-14**

Wow, those are powerful and compelling words. Decision Time for Esther.

Risk life for her countrymen, or hide behind her position as queen and play it safe? What would she do? I want to unpack these words a little bit in just a moment. But first, I want you to see the impact that they had on Esther. They were instrumental in leading her to make a courageous decision.

3. The Courageous Decision (15-17)

She communicated two things to Mordecai.

I need spiritual support. Ask everyone you know to fast and pray for the next three days. She and her maidens would do the same. She understood that this was a spiritual war that could only be won with spiritual weapons.

I will do this thing. She made up her mind to take the risk and intervene on behalf of her people. ***To go*** was scary but she was willing to go.

There are times when a difficult, dangerous, and risky situation calls for our response. Esther shows us how to do it. **First**, get all the spiritual support you can by having others fast and pray with you. **Second**, set your face toward doing the right thing. Be undeterred. Once you know what must be done, determine to do it regardless of the cost. See her resolve? ***If I perish, I perish.***

Spoiler alert . . . the Jews are saved, Haman is executed, and Mordecai is promoted. Pretty good ending. But trust me, there are details you will not want to miss. So, take a little time and read the entire story.

In the last few minutes, I want to go back to the brief, but powerful message Mordecai sent to Esther when she was uncertain of what to do. There were **four principles** that he reminded her of. These propelled her to act in courage and faith. These are the same principles that will enable us to say yes when they call us to go into a dangerous situation. They remind us of four important things.

1) The source of our security (13)

Many people get their security from some pretty insecure sources.

Position: Many folks refuse to stand alone for fear they will lose their position. Afraid of losing their position. **A coach is only as secure as his last win. Landry**

Finances: Your money could be gone tomorrow. Downturn in the economy, bout with a serious disease. Some other tragedy.

Personal Abilities: One day your abilities will fail. Don't trust them.

Esther recognized that her position, money, relationships with others could not ultimately bring her security. **She was only secure in the arms of God.**

The source so our security is God Himself. He is the one who holds us in his hands. We are sheltered underneath the everlasting arms. He cares for us in ways that we cannot know.

2) **The certainty of God's plan (14A)**

He told her flat out that God would save the Jews, with or without her. Only difference would be that if she did not speak up, she would be outside of the deliverance. God does not need us. We need Him. The accomplishment of His divine plans is not dependent upon you or me. If I thought that He depended on me or you for that matter, I'd be a basket case. You and I do not have the power to stop God's plan for to prevent His will from happening. We do have the opportunity to participate or to sit back and watch.

But He has elected to allow us to play strategic roles in His great plans. He could do it without us, but He seldom does. **It is a privilege when God calls us to enter the arena and face threat of danger, harm or death.**

3) **The sovereignty of God's timing (4:14)**

She was queen not just by chance, but by divine appointment. She might not have realized it, but God was working behind the scenes to put her in just the right place at just the right time. She might have thought about how "lucky" she was. She might have decided that she deserved to be the queen because of her beauty and personality. Mordecai makes it clear. There is something else going on behind the scenes. Whatever position you have, don't be foolish enough to think you got there all on your own. God has been working!

Why does God have you where you are? Maybe, so that you can stand for Him and influence those around you. Are they still waiting? Watching? Will you take the risk and stand tall for Christ?

4) The power of dying to self (15-16)

Esther died to self. Nothing else mattered at that point except honoring God. ***If I perish, I perish.*** Sounds melancholy and negative. Just the opposite is true. How could she seem so casual about the possibility of death? She was prepared for it. You are only ready to live when you know you are prepared to die. Once you have settled the issue of death, nothing in life is quite as scary.

Rather than being a melancholy statement of defeat, it was a positive statement of triumph. ***If I live, I win. If I die, I win.***

The point of the ending is not that Esther and her people lived. That's great. The point of the story is that she was faithful. **That's the point! Don't miss it!** She was willing to suffer and die for what was right. The church has been at its best when it has been willing to suffering willingly for Christ and His kingdom.

Spurgeon. *Never did the church so much prosper and so truly thrive as when she was baptized in the blood. The ship of the church never sails so gloriously along as when the bloody spray of her martyrs falls on her deck. We must suffer and we must die, if we are ever to conquer this world for Christ.*

According to most historical reports . . .

Matthew was killed with a sword in Ethiopia.

Mark died after being dragged through the streets of Alexandria.

Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece.

John was put into a cauldron of boiling oil but was miraculously protected.

Peter was crucified upside down in Jerusalem.

James the brother of John was killed with the sword.

James the less was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple then beaten to death.

Thomas was killed with a lance.

Jude was killed with arrows.

Matthias was stoned and then beheaded.

Paul was beheaded in Rome.

That first generation of believers showed us how to live and die for Christ.

The problem with Christians today is that nobody wants to kill them anymore.

Unknown