

Disclaimer: Do you know the difference between research and plagiarism? Research is when you admit your sources... and people are even impressed! Plagiarism hides sources, claims thinking as unique and is unethical. And when preaching, almost every idea that is communicated came from someone else at some time... So I am going to start the message by unmasking my resources – Two big ones. The first is the Biblical book of Esther. The second is a great message by Dr. John Ortberg to Heartland Church. I have borrowed liberally from both... so now you know my 'research' sources.

After the Exile, in the new winter capital – Persia, Susa. Some have returned to Jerusalem and some stayed. This story is about the people who stayed. This takes place around 470 BC and this book – Esther is one of the most exciting and fascinating books of the whole Bible.

Xerxes king of Persia – 120 provinces stretching from India to Africa. And yet, instead of pursuing a mission to rule well, he is a shallow silly little king. He has week-long or six month long parties to display his wealth. And the story talks about one party - filled with drinking and entertainment and he commands his stunning wife Vashti to make an appearance so he can show off what a hot little wife he's got.

She refuses. She is very courageously saying "I am more than just your showpiece for the boys. I am a person and you are treating me as a thing." And Xerxes is not so happy. He consults with the Supreme Court and they reinforce his Shadow mission – Xerxes has a hidden agenda to demonstrate a playboy lifestyle and have women at his beck and call. So he decides to get a new queen so that male dominance can rule in their time. Further he commands the following as a nation wide edict.

**Esther 1:22** He sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province in its own script and language, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases—every man should be master in his own home and say whatever he pleases! You want to guess how that law worked out? Ladies, how would you like to live in that kingdom and that household?

**Esther 2:1** Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. – Xerxes remembered Vashti. Oh yeah, I have to take care of my own business at home. Xerxes has no mission from God to serve God so he just bumps along aimlessly and wakes up and realizes 'hey, I've got no queen!' Credit him for not killing her, but he does replace her.

He decides to get a new queen. He consults with a new group of people – his bodyguard, not the supreme court. Younger men. These testosterone laden young men give him an idea of what he should look for in a queen. What would your guess is their #1 criteria?

**Esther 2:2-4** Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. <sup>3</sup> Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of

Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. <sup>4</sup> Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it. – beautiful virgins with beauty treatments. One from each province. All wind up in the harem, but one will be queen! 127 provinces, 127 women.

Imagine this happening – this is a weird world and nothing like this would ever happen today. Imagine dozens of beautiful women all trying to win the affections of one eligible bachelor. Imagine them each trying to be a little more sexy, a little more charming, a little more desirable. In this process, they get to know each other and form likes, dislikes and alliances while they are primed behind the scenes by makeup artists, hair stylists and clothing experts! Can you imagine all the kingdom watching while one man flirts simultaneously with dozens of women?

And finally, a single woman remains and the bachelor tells her that she is the only one he wants (LONG STEMMED ROSE). What a stupid idea! Now you need to know that the Bible is lampooning this process as hopelessly moronic! Arent you glad we live in much more enlightened time than that?

They think that this is just a beauty contest. But they don't know that God is in the picture. God is always in the picture.

One of the contestants is an orphan named Esther. Her parents both died and she was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She was fair and beautiful. She and Mordecai were also Jewish. This is the first time we get a clue why this book might be in the Bible. They had lost their home and their nation. They were not a part of the people who went back to rebuild Jerusalem, they stayed in Babylon. But Mordecai tells her not to give her identity as Jewishness.

As a finalist, Esther gets prepared and if you read it in the story, you realize she takes a LONG time to prepare. Now first dates often involve a LOT of pressure. Lets do a survey:

- Who ever spent more than 15 minutes getting ready for a date?
- Hour
- More time than the date took?
- How many actually had more fun getting ready for the date than you did on the date?

Look at the prep time for Esther – 6 months with oil and Myrrh and 6 months with perfume and cosmetics - 12 months! Lots of pressure for a first date. And if they don't like you after 12 months prep, it probably ain't going to happen!

And after all of this Esther – the little Jewish orphan Jewish girl – wins!

Esther 2:18 And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. – Esther's banquet. He wants to show off his new bride to all of his officials. Sound familiar? But they do not live happily ever after.

It turns out that there is this official named Haman –the Agagite. (essentially a Canaanite). He was a high ranking official who loved to have everyone bow to him and he has been mortally offended by Mordecai, who won't bow when he walks by.

Unlike the king, Haman is not just silly. He is so filled with ego and pride that he can't let this go. So he decides to destroy not only Mordecai, but the whole Jewish people. He slanders the Jewish people to his silly king and tries to get permission to slaughter/annihilate/kill all who are left.

The king does not even do his homework to discover who these people are and what kind of contribution they have made or trouble they have caused. He simply takes off his signet ring, the sign of his authority – he gives it to Haman and says “whatever”. And they set a date 11 months away, chosen by lots... imagine rolling a die – called a PUR. Remember that. So they set a date where every man woman and child who is Jewish will be annihilated.

**Esther 3:15** The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. – The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered. Think about this – it says much about these two men. A genocide is coming, the city is bewildered at this senseless command. The Jews did not do anything to deserve it! The silly king is drinking and narcissistic Haman is happily keeping him occupied.

**Esther 4:1** When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. <sup>2</sup> But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.

So Mordecai tears his clothes, goes into mourning and sits at the king's gates. Now, you need to know that this is a form of protest in their day. This is like picketing in front of the white house. This is like “Jewish Lives Matter”. Super controversial. This is a way to get into trouble. Esther sends word to her cousin – hey Mordecai, cool off! And Mordecai sends word back to Esther who has been insulated from all this in the palace. She doesn't even know. “Haman has put Xerxes up to killing every Jewish person in the city.”

There is only one person who can save Israel. The Bachelorette. The trophy wife. The beauty queen. And he instructs Esther to go back to the king, plead for her life and her people. To save the life of the Jewish people.

Esther of course does not want to do this. She explains to Mordecai – “you know it is a capital offense to approach the king unsummoned. Especially if you are going to tell the king that you don't like the way he is doing his job! And you know what happened to the last queen that resisted him! And of course she is thinking – If I tell him I am Jewish, then I might be killed for my ethnicity as well!

The other piece of info she drops is this: what is more, the king has not summoned me for 30 days. This means that she is not on his mind. He is not thinking about her. King and queen and they should see each other. But the king has a big harem and apparently he is not quite as excited about Esther as he was in the early days. So it is a move that is unlikely to succeed and likely to cost her life!

Mordecai speaks to Esther some of the most riveting and profound words ever spoken from one human being to another. To the little orphan girl beauty queen he says:

**Esther 4:12-14** When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, <sup>13</sup> he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. <sup>14</sup> For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your

father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?". "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this!?"

The fate of a whole nation rests in your hands. You have not been brought to this place in life to accumulate a beautiful wardrobe and precious gems. You have not been brought to this place to be the most desirable person in the whole kingdom. You have not been brought to this place for any of the reasons the king thinks you have.

You have been brought here to risk it all to oppose a man who is vile and evil, to bring justice, to change fortunes and to save your people. Your life is more than trivia and trappings. You have been brought to this point in your life to be a part of God's plan to redeem your world. You have an opportunity to lay your life down, to sacrifice it all to give it up in order to make your mark forever. Do not allow your success at filling societies stereotype for women blind you to what your role in this world is really all about.

You thought you had a career, but really you have something way better. A calling.

Career is about advancing yourself. Calling is about advancing God's agenda.

- Pharaoh had a career. Moses had a calling.
- Ahab - Elijah
- Nero - Paul
- Pilate - Jesus

How about you – career or calling? As you think about your calling, I want to ask you a few key questions. These four can help you define your calling – even in the midst of a career.

- **Who plays the role of Mordecai in your life?** Who helps you identify what God is calling you to? Who is the spiritual friend who helps you discern God's voice and head in that direction. Thank them this week. Write them a text or send them a note to tell them how much you appreciate it. Invite them to speak into your life with great freedom. If not, then pray "God can you bring someone into my life who can be my Mordecai" He will honor it. If nobody, then get into community where you can meet people who will do that for you. If you are a guy, we are starting a mens ministry on February 15 – Fridays 6am and you are welcome to be a part. Where men speak into the lives of other men
- **What is the 'position' God has called you to?** What is your sphere of influence? Your job, your volunteer role, your neighborhood, your family, your journey group. You have a sphere where your voice is heard. What can you speak into?
- **What resources do you carry?** You have resources to bring to that position. Gifts. You have friends. You have possessions.
- **What is the moment that you live in?** What are the opportunities and pressures and needs that consume you today? These four questions are worth reflection this week.

One woman who lived in a time that made an impact is the Reverend Dr. Barbara Williams Skinner, in the wake of the shootings in the church in South Carolina a couple of years ago said that sometimes God just says to us "It may not be your fault, but it certainly is your time." Back to Esther... she could have said "well, its not my fault this evil is happening!" Now, if you follow Jesus, this is not the ultimate issue.

It is not that you clean up your own messes. You are a part of his redemptive community to change the world!

Josiah missing child story. We looked everywhere! But we never stopped to say "Its your fault, no it's your fault!" Don't you wish the US government could get past saying "It's your fault?"

I love that... it's not your fault, but it is your time... Esther, Its not your fault that the king is a joke. It is not your fault that Haman is a monster. It is not your fault that Antisemitism is epidemic. It is not your fault but it is your time. You have access, privilege and gifts. It is not your fault, but it is your time.

The same is true for you. You did not come to the position you have in this world by accident. You are not there for the reasons that everybody else thinks you are there. You are not designed to be there by accident. NO! God has you there for a purpose. Now it is not your fault that poverty runs rampant in this world. It is not your fault that 10,000 children a day die from preventable causes. Its not your fault that a billion people will go to bed hungry tonight and make less than a dollar a day. Its not your fault... but you may have a little money. You may have some spare time. You might have an idea. You might have some strategic positioning. Is is not your fault, but it is your time.

It is not your fault that slavery came to America. It is not your fault that hundreds of thousands of Africans were brought to the United States against their will to be slaves in Southern farms. Its not your fault that a century of Jim Crow laws kept people degraded and marginalized and impoverished. Its not your fault than an African American boy born to a single mom is more likely to go to prison than he is to go to college. But you might have a little education. You might be able to tutor one kid. You might be able to serve in village one. You have not come to the position for the reasons you think you have, but for such a time as this!

Its not your fault that thousands of kids across Omaha don't know that God loves them and that he died for them. Its not your fault that so many teenagers are feeling societal pressure that anxiety has become an epidemic and that our teens are medicated at unprecedented rates. But maybe you could be a part of our high school or middle school ministry to sock your time into kids that are facing unprecedented pressures. Maybe you will be that one person in a world where they wonder is there any adult who cares? You will be the one person who they know cares.

It is not your fault that there are billions of people in countries like Cuba and Senegal and Mali who have never heard the good news or don't have adequate medical care. Its not your fault that there is not clean water or a drought hits. It is not your fault, but maybe it is your time.

It is not your fault, but it is your time. God is opening up doors to our church and other churches like no time in history... the question is whether individuals will step up with their time, their resources, their passions to say 'Maybe I was brought HERE for such a time as this!.'

If you are new to CCC, you have to know that this is a hallmark of our church. We will do everything we can to be a part of the solution for our people, our city and our world. For 97 years, CCC has been at the forefront of bringing the kingdom to Omaha. We have said "It may not be my fault, but it is my time." Thousands have come to faith in Jesus by faithful witnesses. Thousands of kids have grown up in the faith. Here at our church, plus the 30 daughter and granddaughter churches we have planted over the years are bringing the kingdom. Village One is different because of CCC. This week the newspaper reported that we are in the longest streak ever with no homicides in Omaha. 115 days now. Ten years

ago, we had two or three per month and the African American Child poverty rate was the highest in the world. But because of many factors, including Lighthouses, churchplants, tutoring and love. Omaha is different. Mali is different because of CCC. Over 20,000 babies have been safely born in the hospital we built there. We just passed a milestone for 2018 – YOU sent over 1 Million dollars to the Great Commission fund – to help 600 missionaries take the best news ever to the least reached people! Because of you, Millard is different. Elkhorn is different. China is different. Cuba is different. Peru is different. Fremont is different. Because 90 years of people stood up and said “It was not my fault, but it is my time.” Will we do the same thing?

And all of this is a reflection of Jesus. You know that we celebrate Jesus together here every week to worship him and leave this place to imitate him. And the sins of the world were not Jesus’ fault. Wars, and hatred and disease and infidelity and ego were not Jesus’ fault. Genocide and divorce and abuse were not Jesus fault. But when he came face to face with the cross, it WAS his time. It was his choice. It was his love. It was his gift. Aren’t you glad that we serve ONE who says: It may not be my fault, but it certainly is my time!

Esther 4:16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."— when this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.

So Esther gathers with her friends for fasting and prayer – 3 days. She asks Mordecai to get the Jewish people together for fasting and prayer.

When was the last time you had a period of fasting and prayer for clarity on your mission?

And if I perish, I perish! OH! These words are as magnificent as the challenge Mordecai gave! What a woman! What a heart?

Story of Mattel one time messing up the voiceboxes of Barbie and GI Joe. I imagine GI Joe saying “Lets shop til we drop” and Barbie saying “Hit the ground, hard, hard, hard.” You see Xerxes thought he was getting Barbie, but he really got GI Joe.

If I perish I perish! I have come to my position for such a time as this.

She says no to her shadow mission and yes to God’s calling on her!

And what comes next is heart-pounding suspense!

It all happens on the third day. And in the Bible, the third day is always a really significant day, where big stuff happens. Jonah. Jesus. Esther. She puts on her robes and her oils. She places the royal crown on her head, maybe for the last time. She walks through the palace to the king without being invited... heads roll for this. Her heart is pounding, hands are sweaty and she stands openly, defiantly in front of the king. The buzz and whispering is palpable. This is life and death drama.

The king sees, he rises, he looks. She waits for the movement of his scepter that says she can come in.

What happens here? You have to read the story.... Seriously. It is a wild ride if you don’t know it and I want you all to be reading if you don’t know the end.

But let me say this... As a result of Esther's courage, a Holiday still celebrated today – Purim. Pur is for the lots or dice that were cast 'im' is plural. It is the celebration that happens in March. It celebrates Esther's courage in sparing the people. It celebrates the idea that God is always working behind the scenes.

Notice: God is never mentioned... not even once. It is an invitation to look for God's activity in the everyday:

- Winning the contest
- A woman being the hero of the Jews in a culture women were not respected. Don't miss this Bible theme that God is always elevating the role and value of women! Unlikely a woman... a beautiful woman... a trophy wife... a Jewish trophy wife... An orphaned Jewish Trophy wife with everything to lose. You think you are unlikely? Look to the courage of Esther.
- The timing of King Xerxes discovering Mordecai saved the king's life
- The ironic sense of justice
- No matter how much it LOOKS like God is absent, no matter how much his people violate the law, marry Gentiles, go to drinking parties.... He is there, pulling the strings and saving people

But the question remains for all of us "What is God's calling on my life? For what reason did he create me? What is my mission now? Where do I look in the world and say "It may not be my fault, but it is my time!"

God has a CALLING on your life. Are you aware of it? Are you willing to act courageously in the face of turmoil. Are you willing to say "It may not be my fault... but it IS my time." God is inviting you into his purposes!