

Counting The Cost . . . Part 2!

Our Text: **Esther 4:1-17** *When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

Last week we started to look at this interchange between Mordecai and Esther through Hathach.

- When Mordecai learned of the plot to exterminate all of the Jews, He decided to do something about it . . .
- He went to the king's gate and mourned in sackcloth and ashes.
- He let the cat out of the bag by telling Hathach that he needed to tell Esther to approach the king and try to save "her people".
- He then was going to tell her to remember that **GOD IS THE PRIMARY IN THIS STORY, AND EVERY OTHER ONE, AND SHE CANNOT FORGET THAT FACT!!!**

Let's pick it up here . . .

Notice . . . In his reply to what Queen Esther told him, Mordecai reminded Esther of three solemn facts and a fourth lesson to be learned.

Let's read it again:

Esther 4:13-14 And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

This goes down in history as one of those “turning point speeches.” Mordecai says, “First of all, if you do nothing, don’t think you will escape death. Being a Jew, you will die like the rest of us. And second, even if we die, God is not limited to you or me, nor will He allow His people to perish. He will use someone to save our nation. And then, third, how great it would be if He sovereignly chose to use you. Could it be that this explains why you were chosen to be queen, my dear Esther—for such a time as this—for this very moment?” This is intrinsic motivation at its best.

Winston Churchill was a master at wording such rallying remarks. In a speech to his beleaguered nation in the House of Commons, June 18, 1940, he said, “Let us brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, “This was their finest hour.”

And not quite four months later, in possibly the darkest hour of the war for Great Britain, he said, “Death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey, hardship our garment; constancy our valor and our only shield. We must be united, we must be undaunted, we must be inflexible.”

Stand alone! Fight to the end! It’s Patrick Henry’s, “Give me liberty or give me death.” It’s Nathan Hale’s, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” It is patriotism standing at attention.

And this is the kind of message Mordecai sends to Esther. “This is your hour. Stand. Speak! Die! But whatever you do, Don’t be silent.” Esther shows her true colors—and they are brilliantly bold.

~ Chuck Swindoll

- **Notice first that he told her that her being a palace resident was no guarantee that she would be delivered from death.**

Remember what the royal edict said?

Esther 3:13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Haman would see to it that every last Jew was discovered and slain, even those in the palace. Furthermore, there were probably palace servants who were still loyal to Vashti and would be happy to see Queen Esther removed!

- **Secondly, Mordecai reminded her that her silence wouldn't prevent deliverance from coming from some other source.**

What Mordecai is bringing out here is the providence of God! (*Even though the name of God isn't mentioned.*)

Mordecai knew the Abrahamic covenant:

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Because of this, he had faith that the people of Israel would be protected from annihilation . . . **BECAUSE GOD IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DO THAT!!!**

However, he warned Esther that, even if deliverance did come, some of the Jews might still be slain **AND THAT SHE MIGHT BE ONE OF THEM!!!**

So the question has to be asked, "***Why would God send "relief and deliverance" to the Jewish people but allow Esther and her relatives to be slain?"***"

Maybe Mordecai saw this as a consequence for her unwillingness to intercede for the people.

James 4:17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Instead of protecting herself by her silence, Esther might be putting herself into greater jeopardy. After all, Haman and his agents would have little trouble finding her in the palace and taking her life.

- **Mordecai then emphasizes a third fact: Esther being in the palace was not an accident, for she had "come to royal position for such a time as this".**

Mordecai didn't say that God had put her there . . . **BUT THAT'S WHAT HIS STATEMENT AMOUNTED TO!!!**

If Esther just paused long enough to take the time to review her life, **SHE COULDN'T HELP BUT SEE THAT GOD HAD BEEN LEADING HER ALL THE WAY!!!**

- **If God brought her to the throne, then He had a purpose in mind!**
 - **And that purpose was now evident: She was there to intercede for her people!**
- Genesis 50:20*** But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

As we ponder Mordecai's words, we will learn some basic truths about the providence of God that are important for us as Christians today:

- The first is that *God has divine purposes to accomplish in this world.*
- God's purposes involve the Jewish nation as well as the Gentile nations of the world.
- They also involve the church.
- God deals with individuals as well as with nations.
- His purposes touch the lives of kings and queens and common people,
- His purposes includes godly people and wicked people.
- **There is nothing in this world that is outside the influence of the purposes of God!**

Mordecai made it clear that **GOD ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSES THROUGH PEOPLE!!!**

“For reasons we don't fully understand, God permits wicked people to do evil things in this world, but He can work in and through unbelievers and His own people to accomplish His purposes.” Warren Wiersbe

Just think of God's sovereignty throughout the story thus far:

- God permitted the king's drunkenness and his foolishness in deposing Vashti.
- He used the king's loneliness to place Esther on the throne.
- In chapter 6, He will use the king's sleeplessness to reward Mordecai and start to overthrow the power of Haman.

The bottom line is this . . . **IN GREAT THINGS AND IN LITTLE THINGS, GOD IS ABSOLUTELY SOVEREIGN!!!**

In fact, God will accomplish His purposes even if His servants refuse to obey His will!

If Esther rejected the will of God for her life, God could still save His people . . . But Esther would be the loser in that scenario.

Once again, Warren Wiersbe said it well, ***“When ministers and missionaries appeal to the church for volunteers for Christian service, they sometimes give the impression that God's work is at the mercy of God's workers, but this isn't true.***

If you and I refuse to obey God, either He can abandon us and get somebody else to do the job, and we will lose the reward and blessing, or He can discipline us until we surrender to His will.”

Here are a couple of examples that help explain this . . .

One example of just finding someone else is like when John Mark left the mission field and returned home:

Acts 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:36–41 Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

So God raised up Timothy to take his place:

Acts 16:1–3 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

However, an example of God disciplining someone until they yield to His will is Jonah. He ran from God, but the Lord kept after him until he obeyed, even though he didn't obey from his heart.

Jonah 1:15-3:3 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. ² And he said: “I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me. ‘Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice. For You cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, “I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. “When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. “Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”

So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

When God isn't permitted to rule, HE OVERRULES, AND HE ALWAYS ACCOMPLISHES HIS PURPOSES!!!

• The fourth lesson we learn from Mordecai’s speech is that God isn’t in a hurry but will fulfill His plans in due time.

- God waited until the third year of the king’s reign before taking Vashti off the throne.
- Then He waited another four years before putting Esther on the throne.
- It was not until the king’s twelfth year that God allowed Haman to hatch his evil plot.
- And that the “*crisis day*” for the Jews would be almost a year away.

If we are reading the book of Esther for the first time, we might become impatient with God and start to think that He hasn’t been doing anything . . .

- In chapters 1 and 2, a drunken king and his flattering advisers seem to be in charge.
- From chapter 3 to chapter 6, it looks as though wicked Haman is in control.
- Even after Haman is off the scene, it’s the king’s unalterable decree that keeps everybody busy.
- *So where is God?*

Once again, GOD IS NEVER IN A HURRY LIKE WE ARE!!! HE KNOWS THE BEGINNING FROM THE END AND HE IS ALWAYS RIGHT AND ALWAYS ON TIME!!!

Dr. A. W. Tozer said that ***“God’s sovereign purposes are like an ocean liner leaving New York City, bound for Liverpool, England. The people on board the ship are free to do as they please, but they aren’t free to change the course of the ship.”***

The mighty liner of God’s sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history. God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfillment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

To quote Dr. Tozer again: ***“In the moral conflict now raging around us whoever is on God’s side is on the winning side and cannot lose; whoever is on the other side is on the losing side and cannot win.”***

Let’s wrap this up . . .

He Acted On The Plan!

Esther 4:15-17 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

When we first started this book and met Esther and Mordecai, they were hiding their identities as Jews . . . Now Mordecai is enlisting other Jews in the struggle against

Haman, and Esther is commanding her Gentile ladies-in-waiting to participate in the fast.

Why bring this up? To emphasize the point we have been making all the way through our study in the Book of Esther . . .

Even though, once again, the name of God is not mentioned in the text, this act by Queen Esther was obviously directed to the Lord and was certainly accompanied by prayer!

Fasting and prayer are often found together in Scripture, because fasting is a preparation for concentrated and humble prayer:

Ezra 8:21–23 *Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, “The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him.” So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer.*

Psalms 35:13 *But as for me, when they were sick, My clothing was sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting; And my prayer would return to my own heart.*

Daniel 9:3 *Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*

Acts 13:3 *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*

Keep in mind that if fasting is only a formal religious ritual, it accomplishes no spiritual purpose. **But if it precedes consecrated prayers unto the Lord, IT IS MOST POWERFUL!!!**

Since Jews throughout the empire were already “fasting, weeping and wailing” (Esther 4:3), it wouldn’t be difficult for Mordecai to ask the Jews in Shushan to pray for Esther as she prepared to intercede before the king.

- This was a matter of life and death both for her and for her people, and God used the crisis that
- Haman had created to bring a spiritual revival to His people scattered among the Gentiles.

Have we noticed that we often have to experience trouble before we will humble ourselves and cry out to God?

What about Esther’s words, **“And if I perish, I perish.”** It’s kind of like saying, **“I’ll do God’s will, whatever the cost!”**

Here, Esther echoes the same surrender and confidence that Paul expressed to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:24 ***But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.***

From the human point of view, everything was against Esther and the success of her mission: •

- The law was against her, because nobody was allowed to interrupt the king.
- The government was against her, for the decree said that she was to be slain.
- Her sex was against her, because the king's attitude toward women was worse than chauvinistic.
- The officers were against her, because they did only those things that ingratiated themselves with Haman.
- In one sense, even the fast could be against her; for going three days without food and drink would not necessarily improve her appearance or physical strength.

But:

Romans 8:31 ***What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***

The answer to that is— ***“NOBODY!!!”***

Let's pray . . .