

Counting The Cost . . . Part 1!

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.

History is full of accounts of single individuals who have made a difference. Think of the military battles that have turned on the axis of one heroic person. Think of the artists and the contribution of their individual lives, from Michelangelo and da Vinci to Brahms and Beethoven. Think of the scientists, the inventors, the explorers, the technological experts who have literally changed the course of history. Think of the courageous preachers down through time who have stood alone in the gap and made a difference. The face of the church was changed by significant individuals—men like Augustine, Tyndale, Bunyan, Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Spurgeon, Moody, and Graham, to name only a few.

Or, to look at it from another angle, think of the difference one vote can make. Come voting time, many neglect to exercise one of the greatest privileges of democracy, thinking that their vote makes no difference. Several years ago I came across a profound statement that conveys the importance of one vote.

• In 1645, one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of England;

- ***In 1649, one vote caused Charles I of England to be executed;***
- ***In 1776, one vote gave America the English language instead of German;***
- ***In 1839, one vote elected Marcus Morton governor of Massachusetts;***
- ***In 1845, one vote brought Texas into the Union;***
- ***In 1868, one vote saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment.***
- ***In 1875, one vote changed France from a monarchy to a republic;***
- ***In 1876, one vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the United States presidency;***
- ***In 1923, one vote gave Adolph Hitler control of the Nazi party;***
- ***In 1941, one vote saved the Selective Service System just 12 weeks before Pearl Harbor!***

Many scholars estimate that there were about fifteen million Jews scattered throughout the Persian Empire at the time that all of this was going on. But because of Haman's hatred, and King Ahasuerus carelessness, **ALL OF THEM WERE NOW APPOINTED TO DIE!!!**

Some will ask, *"Why didn't they just get up and leave the kingdom?"*

- *If they did that, where would they go?*
 - Even their own land of Israel wasn't safe because it was under the rule of Ahasuerus.
- Esther 1:1** *Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),*

In other words, **THERE WAS NO REAL PLACE FOR THEM TO ESCAPE!**

But not everyone felt the same way about the extermination of the Jews:

- Haman and the king completely ignored the plight of the Jews and sat down to a royal feast.
- Meanwhile, the people of the capital city were "perplexed" and didn't know what to do.

Esther 3:15 *The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.*

Perplexed = בִּזְיוֹן *buk* = *To wander around in a state of bewilderment.*

- And then you have people like Queen Esther, Who because she was secluded in the royal harem, knew nothing about the danger that she and her people faced.

In this confused state, some fasted. Some mourned.

Esther 4:3 *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.*

BUT MORDECAI GOT UP AND COUNTED THE COST AND BEGAN TO ACT!!!

So what did he do?

He Voiced His Concern!

Esther 4:1-3 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.

Mordecai's appearance and actions showed his belief in God!

He was showing great godly grief like David did when Saul and Jonathan were killed:

2 Samuel 1:11-12 Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

He was also showing deep repentance like Jonah and the Children of Israel:
Jonah 3:1-10 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. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Nehemiah 9:1-2 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Let's be clear though . . . **Mordecai was neither afraid nor ashamed to let people know where he stood!!!**

- He had already told the officers at the gate that he was a Jew!
- Now he was telling the whole city that he was not only a Jew but also that he opposed the murderous edict of Haman!

We all need to stand up and count the cost!

“All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”

Edmund Burke

Whether it be the stopping the killing of the unborn, protecting children who are trafficked, providing for widows and orphans, or standing in the gap of those being martyred . . . **WE CANNOT BE NEUTRAL OR SILENT WHEN HUMAN LIVES ARE AT STAKE!!!**

Proverbs 24:11-12 Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.

If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

And where did Mordecai go as he was mourning? RIGHT TO THE KINGS GATE . . . AS WE ALL SHOULD!!!

In those days, the king’s gate was the commercial and legal hub of the city. *(It was like a combination of a marketplace and a courtroom at the same time.)*

This was as far as he could go because Oriental kings lived in an artificial paradise that sheltered them from the realities of life. ***“No sackcloth must come within their gates. They must have a good time at any cost. They must live their easy and comfortable lives, as if there were no voices calling them.”*** *(The Afterglow of God, 72).* Scottish preacher George H. Morrison

But this is the opposite of our Heavenly Father . . . **He welcomes us to bring our burdens and sorrows to Him and this is all made possible because of the efficacious death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ!!!!**

What was Mordecai hoping to accomplish at the gate with his sackcloth and his wailing?

Perhaps somebody from the palace would take notice of him and get a message to Queen Esther. Remember . . . The queen’s ladies-in-waiting knew Mordecai: ***Esther 2:11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women’s quarters, to learn of Esther’s welfare and what was happening to her.***

And, although they didn’t know the relationship between Mordecai and the queen, he had already sent information to the queen through some of her retainers: ***Esther 2:22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name.***

Since Mordecai couldn’t enter the house of the women, this was his only hope . . . **AND IT WORKED!!!**

- Esther received the report that Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth and ashes, mourning at the king's gate.
- Since she wasn't told the reason for her cousin's strange conduct, she did the logical thing and sent him fine clothes to put on lest his sackcloth arouse the concern of the king's officers and guards.
- Mordecai's mourning, however, finally got the attention of the queen, and that's what he wanted.

Then what does he do?

He Explained The Dire Situation!

Esther 4:4-9 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.

- Mordecai's refused the new clothes and this was going to give him an opportunity to get his vital message to the queen.
- So Esther she sent one of her eunuchs to the gate to ask Mordecai what was wrong.

I love what Warren Wiersbe adds in here:

"I doubt that Hathach realized what an important part he was playing in God's plan to defeat Haman and save the Jews. So often in the work of the Lord, He uses obscure people to accomplish important tasks.

What was the name of the lad who gave Jesus his loaves and fish?

Who were the men who rescued Paul by lifting him over that Damascus wall in a basket?

What was the name of the little servant girl who told Naaman to go see the prophet?

We don't know, but God used these people to accomplish His purposes. As great doors can swing upon small hinges, so great events can turn upon the deeds of "small" and sometimes anonymous people."

Not only did Mordecai know all the facts about the decree, but he also had a copy of it for Esther to read for herself! Not only is this evidence key, but this also proves that he held a high position in the government, a position God had given him for the very purpose of saving the Jewish nation.

But Mordecai didn't stop with just informing the queen . . . **He was going to urge her to reveal her true nationality and go to the royal throne and intercede for her people!**

But if we are not careful;, we can miss something here:

Esther 4:7-8 *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.***

When Mordecai told Hathach to tell the queen to ask for mercy "**for her people**", **HE WAS LETTING THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG!!!**

He clearly divulged to Hathach the fact that Esther was a Jewess!

- *Did it shock Hathach?*
- *Or was he perhaps a Jew himself, and that's why Mordecai entrusted him with this secret? (Remember, just like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon, Jewish exiles in the Persian Empire were often pressed into royal service.)*
- In either case, **IT WAS NOW OUT IN THE OPEN!!!**

Now, for the moment we've all been waiting for . . . *How would Queen Esther respond to this crisis?*

He Challenged And Exhorted The Queen!

Esther 4:10-14 *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?"

- As we discussed, Mordecai couldn't speak directly to Esther so had to send his messages to her via Hathach.
- Because of this, Esther had no way of sensing "*personally*" how Mordecai felt.
- Nor could Mordecai fully understand how Esther was expressing herself.
- So this back and forth was extremely strategic.

It makes a huge difference when we can see the faces and hear the voices of the people we communicate with. **Hathach had a massive responsibility placed on him**

as the living link between two distressed people (*Mordecai and Esther*) with the salvation of the Jewish nation hanging in the balance!

Let's look again at verses 10 and 11:

Esther 4:10-11 *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."***

We have to understand that Esther's reply was not an evasion or excuses, but rather an explanation . . . She was reminding Mordecai of what he already knew . . . **That nobody, not even the queen, could rush into the throne room and ask for an immediate audience with the king! If she were to do that, she would take her life into her hands!**

Some have argued that the impression that Mordecai gives is that he may have misinterpreted Esther's message . . . They say it may have sounded to him like Esther was trying to hide her nationality and avoid the responsibility of presenting herself to the king . . . Once again, had he seen and heard her in person, he probably would have judged her differently.

In any case, his reply reminded Esther of three solemn facts and a fourth lesson to be learned. But we will get to that next week.

***I am only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything;
But still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.***

~ Edward Everett Hale

Let's pray . . .