

Being Moved From Fear To Faith

Esther 4:1-17 | Notes

Introduction

God pursues his lost sheep & brings them back into the fold of his love. As sinners, we would have no hope if it were not for this sacred gospel truth.

- If we are truly God's children, chosen in Christ, God will not let our sins have the victory; he will not let the faint ember of our faith be snuffed out.
- By whatever means is necessary our Father will draw us to Christ, keep us in his love, preserve our souls from death, and persevere us to the end.
- These promises are what we mean when we say that *salvation is not by man's decisions, effort, or works*, but **by God's SOVEREIGN GRACE alone.**
- **But what does it really look like for God to go after his lost sheep?** How does he do this? How does he bring the straying believer back to the place of humility, repentance, & devotion? How does he keep his weak & wavering children secure in his love? **The answer is by his holy PROVIDENCE.**
- *That is, by his holy, wise, & perfect governance of all things at all times for the everlasting glory of his name and the everlasting good of his people.*

We have already seen 2 previous situations in which the Lord, by his holy providence, has done this very thing for his beloved child, Mordecai.

- Twice God has placed Mordecai into positions where his weak & failing faith was divinely fanned into flame & rekindled by **A MOMENT OF DECISION.**
- In both cases, God used very difficult circumstances to keep Mordecai from falling away; from drifting into apostasy & turning his heart from God.
- Today we will see our holy & loving God now do the very same thing for his beloved child, Esther.
- By our heavenly Father's holy and sovereign providence, we will see our LORD use even the evil plots of men, the fear and threat of death, and the grievous sufferings of this world **to shepherd Esther's weak and wandering heart back to himself.**
- **We will see God exercise his holy providence to move Esther from fear to faith—from self-focused cowardice to self-sacrificing courage—from hiding her identity as a child of God to openly testifying to all that she is one of God's beloved people no matter what that testimony may cost her.**
- **We will even see Esther begin to understand her pain & sorrow not as evidence of God's absence, but as evidence of his perfect wisdom & love.**

I. Mordecai's Pain (Read 4:1-3)

All suffering is full of sorrow, misery, & pain. But the particular form of suffering which God's people faced in Esther's days was peculiarly grievous.

- Like a terminal diagnosis, God's people were made to live for 11 months under the judgment of certain death. They were made to wake up each new day knowing that they had no power within themselves to overcome their enemies, no means by which to ease their trouble or calm their anxieties.
- Day after day they would awake to feel as though the warm breath of their enemies was haunting the back of their necks, ready to strike.
- Night after night they would toss and turn knowing the day of their destruction was rushing upon them like an avalanche and they could not stop it.

And yet, there are sweet and precious gifts from God hidden within the sorrows he sovereignly sends upon his saints. (Ps. 119:67, 71; Rom. 8:28; Jm. 1:2-4)

- **One of those exceedingly precious gifts is the way that suffering, like a shepherd, leads the hearts of the elect to a depth of humility, repentance, & prayerfulness before God which we would never be able to reach by any other road.**
- This is because suffering empties men of pride and arrogance. It empties men of the illusion of their own power, ability, & control. And it teaches those who receive it by faith that they must live in surrender & dependence upon the Lord our God because all other roads lead only to destruction.

This kind of spiritual revival of otherwise cold & slumbering hearts is exactly what see God use this moment of suffering to produce in his people.

- **The furnace of affliction fanned into flame the faint ember of their faith & brought it back to a roaring fire of earnest dependence upon the Lord.**
- When they heard of the judgment, Mordecai & all other believing Jews were divinely awakened to a new humility before God in prayer & repentance.
- From India to Ethiopia, God's people began crying out for mercy, they were openly recognizing that they had gone astray, & they were reminding one another to seek the face of God because they knew it was only the Lord who could deliver them from the sorrow into which their sins had led them.
- **Do you see how God was using what Haman meant for evil & destruction to awaken the slumbering faith of his people & preserve them in his love?**
- **But NOT Esther—at least not yet.** As you recall, Esther was still hiding her association with God's people; she was still relying on herself rather than God, trying to "win" her own deliverance by her beauty & wits. But God would not leave her there—drifting from his love & wandering from the faith.
- **The Good Shepherd will come to seek & save the lost whom he has chosen. He will not lose even one of those whom the Father has given to him.**

II. Mordecai's Plan (Read 4:4-8)

In her hiding & compromising with the world, Esther had become so isolated from God's people that she was totally unaware of what was going on.

- **But it seems that Mordecai had a plan.** Do you remember in v2 where we read that Mordecai was wailing outside **"the entrance to the king's gate?"**
- Not only was Mordecai crying out to God through this public lament, but he was also trying to get the attention of the queen whom he now believed God had intentionally and sovereignly positioned in the royal house those many years ago **"for such a time as this."** (v14)
- **His plan worked.** At first, Esther's only concern was for her adoptive father to stop making a fool of himself. So she offered him proper clothes. (v4)
- But Mordecai refused. If he was going to die, he wanted to die in a posture of faith & humility before God. He did not care what the world thought.
- So Esther **"called for Hathach...and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn"** what was going on and why Mordecai was behaving as he was. (v5-6)
- It was then that Mordecai **"told him all that had happened..."** and **"gave him a copy of the decree...that he might show it to Esther."** (v7-8a)
- Then came Mordecai's **"command"** to his daughter: **"GO TO THE KING TO BEG HIS FAVOR AND PLEAD WITH HIM ON BEHALF OF [YOUR] PEOPLE."** (v8b)
- **A MOMENT OF DECISION was now thrust upon Esther which would force her dormant faith to a turning point: Will I deny my faith or own it? Will I trust in God no matter what comes or will I turn away from him and trust in myself to be my protector and provider? Do I really believe?**

III. Esther's Fear (Read 4:9-14)

v9-11 | When called to publicly identify herself as one of God's people & take a stand for their defense, the first thing that fills Esther's heart is FEAR.

- For Esther to identify herself as a Jew would be to voluntarily add her name to the list of those for whom destruction had been irreversibly decreed.
- Moreover, Esther references the fact that it was common knowledge that what Mordecai "**commanded**" of her was *also* likely to lead to her death.
- A strict law was in place that prevented anyone from entering the king's presence without invitation. The punishment was **death**. (This law was enforced!)
- Therefore, to Esther, what Mordecai "**commanded**" seemed like **madness**. It seemed **utterly foolish & self-destructive**. Surely she was asking:
Why would I willingly add my name to the list of those for whom persecution is decreed? Why would I risk the wrath of the king upon my head?

But the reason his command seemed absurd was because Esther was only thinking of the temporary, not the eternal, and of herself, not of others.

- **Esther was thinking about what it might cost her to stand up for God & his people. But she failed to think about what it might cost her not to.** (Mt. 10:28)
- In this moment, Esther's mind was set on the flesh and the things of the flesh (Rm. 8:7-8).
- Her **desire for comfort & ease, for peace & security**, as well as her **FEAR of personal pain & suffering** were **CONTROLLING HER LIFE—not her FAITH**.
- **Beloved, we all feel this way when we take the Christian life seriously. While we are not all called to face down the literal threat of death, each of us must choose whether we will die to ourselves & live to God or die to God & live to ourselves—whether we will be led by FEAR or by FAITH.**
- If our focus is on ourselves, our comfort, and having our best life now, we will not stand up for Christ or obey his commandments when it is hard.
- **The call to forsake all & follow Christ no matter what it may cost us only makes sense when measured in light of eternity by faith.** (I Cor. 15:19)
- It is only when we consider our lives & our actions in light of God's Word & in light of eternity that we will measure them rightly. (Ps. 73:16-17; II Cor. 4:16-18)
- **It is only then that we will see that facing pain, suffering, rejection, ridicule, and even death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person.**
- **The worst thing that could ever happen to a person is for them to turn away from the living God in unbelief, to refuse his call of faith & obedience, and to try to 'keep their life in this world' only to discover in the end that, by so doing, they have forfeit their soul for all eternity.** (Mt. 16:24-27; Lk. 9:23-26)
- **Therefore, like Esther, we too need to hear & carefully consider the powerful words of response which Mordecai delivered to Esther's fearful heart.**

v12-14 | There are 3 central lessons contained in Mordecai's response which are of critical importance as we seek to follow Christ in this world.

- 1. Remember that this is not ultimately a decision between safety or suffering. It is a decision between trusting God or turning away from him.** (v13-14)
 - The judgment that Esther should have had in mind & feared above all is not the judgment of King Ahasuerus, but the judgment of God. (Same for us!)
 - Esther might be able to hide from the persecution soon to be inflicted by Haman, but she would never be able to hide her heart from the Lord. (Hb. 4:13)
 - Turning away from God in unbelief & fear might mean temporary safety in this life, but it will always mean eternal sorrow in the life to come. (Mk. 13:13)
 - **Therefore, whatever the cost may be to walk by faith & follow Christ, it is always less than the cost of rejecting him by turning away in unbelief.** (Rev. 21:7)
- 2. Remember that our God is always faithful to keep his covenant promises to his people—it is he who rules & reigns over all, not our enemies.** (v14a)
 - Mordecai is confident that "**deliverance will rise for the Jews**" This is because, in his renewed faith, he knows that God will never forsake his people.
 - To every human sense it looked like all the power was in the hands of their enemies. But by faith, Mordecai knows that this is not true.
 - Mordecai knows that his God is on the throne, and that the wickedness of man shall not have the last word over the people of God.
 - Instead of being led by **FEAR**, Mordecai is now being led by **FAITH** in his God. And he encourages Esther to "walk by faith & not sight" as well. (II Cor. 5:7)
 - He encourages Esther to be awakened in faith & cling to God's unchangeable character, unbreakable promises, & everlasting power for hope.
 - **Beloved, we must learn to walk by this faith as well. We must remember that no enemy, no scheme, no sin, no sickness, no sorrow, not even Satan himself has ultimate power of us! We have the promise that even the worst evils which befall us are all being turned for our eternal good. Believe!**
- 3. Remember that there is no such thing as purposeless pain or meaningless sorrow. Everything God allows in our lives is part of a perfect plan.** (v14b)
 - **It was the way that Esther had been viewing the deep pain of her life that led her to doubt the Lord & to be led by fear.** B/c of the way she viewed her suffering she was no longer trusting God but relying on herself, trying to control her life, to be her own defender & keeper, protector & provider.
 - **But Mordecai now teaches Esther that she must learn to understand her painful circumstances by FAITH and not by FEAR.** (Jer. 29:11-14; Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23)
 - Esther must learn to see the wise & loving hand of God behind the sufferings & hardships she has faced—and to see his good purpose in them all.
 - With the eyes of **FEAR**, her pain only seems like evidence to doubt & turn away. But w/ the eyes of **FAITH**, her pain is now full of purpose & meaning, and is being turned by God not only for the good of her own soul—teaching her to know and love the Lord!—but for the salvation of many! (**Tapestry**)
 - **Beloved, the same is true for every sorrow and pain that you face as a Christian as well. All of it has purpose and meaning in God's perfect plan. All of it is being used by your Father in heaven to bless your soul, to nurture your faith, to keep you in his love, and to position you to bless others.**

IV. Esther's Faith (Read 4:15-17)

Mordecai's words pierced Esther's heart like a Spirit-empowered sermon of truth & fanned the faint ember of her faith into a blazing fire of devotion.

- Instead of depending on herself, she began to depend on the Lord in prayer. Instead of being controlled by **FEAR** she began to walk by **FAITH**.
- Instead of clinging to this fleeting life as if it were the great treasure, she began to look to eternity and to the life to come with God as her treasure.
- **By faith, Esther came to believe that suffering & even dying in God's service would be far greater than living in unbelief & disobedience to him.**

Application:

May we too take the lessons of Mordecai's sermon to heart so that we too are moved from fear to faith in the service of Christ.

