

A Half-Hour with Esther

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Somewhere around 473 B.C., as many of the Jews were still dispersed among the Medo-Persians, a man named Haman became very angry at Mordecai the Jew. Haman, one of the top officials in the court of Ahasuerus, emperor of Medo-Persia, was not satisfied with simply rebuking and punishing Mordecai. He wanted to vent his anger on Mordecai's people the Jews. He developed a plan to not only kill Mordecai, but wipe out the Jewish nation. Little did he know that Esther, the queen of Medo-Persia, was Jewish and Mordecai's cousin. Esther stood in the gap and saved the entire Jewish nation by informing the king of Haman's plot against her and her people and asking the king to punish Haman instead. If we could spend a half-hour with Esther, the most powerful woman in her world and a servant of God, what would she tell us?

Discussion:

- I. Pray and get others to pray (include some fasting)
 - A. In **Esther 4:8**, Mordecai told Esther she needed to go to her husband, the king, and plead on behalf of her people. Esther immediately presented the problem with Mordecai's plan in **vs. 11**. No one, not even the queen, was allowed to simply come into the presence of the king unless summoned. If a person came into his presence and he did not hold out his golden scepter, they would be put to death. Mordecai prevailed upon Esther to make the attempt in **vss. 13-14**.
 - B. When Esther was convinced to go to the king, she made a request in **vs. 16**. She wanted all the Jews in Susa (the capital city) to fast for her for three days. She and her maidens would also fast. Do not misunderstand, there is nothing miraculous about not eating. Fasting is not just the cessation of eating. Biblical fasting is neglecting the physical needs in order to devote time to spiritual activity. Inherent in a biblical fast is prayer. In other words, Esther was claiming that the Jews, whose lives were on the line, needed to be so concerned about her going to the king that instead of eating they needed to pray. This was not just a request to "Say a prayer for me." This was a request to be absolutely devoted to prayer on her behalf for an extended period of time.
 - C. Obviously, we cannot read the mind of God and second guess how He would have acted if circumstances were different. However, following the three days of fasting, Esther came into her king and husband in **Esther 5:2** and he held out his golden scepter. We have a lot of issues about which we casually ask people to pray. Is there anything we view as so spiritually important that we not only devote ourselves to prayer but would ask all of our friends and the entire congregation to devote themselves to prayer and fasting for? Esther would encourage us to realize how strongly we need God's help and learn to pray, devoting ourselves to it. Beyond that, she would encourage us to press others into prayer service, even including fasting.
- II. Remember God has granted you your position, use it to glorify and serve Him.
 - A. How many times have we seen the exact and easy solution to someone else's problem when they could not? Because we do not have much at stake in other people's problems, their solutions are always easier to see. As someone once said, it is hard to read the label if you are inside the bottle. Esther had this same problem. From our standpoint, Esther going to the king is the natural solution. Why not? She is the queen. If anyone is going to be able to plead for the Jewish people it would be the Jewish queen.
 - B. At first, however, all she could think about was her own neck. What if the king did not want to see her that day and withheld the golden scepter? However, in **Esther 4:14**, Mordecai said, "Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" Mordecai did not say that God planned it this way. He simply made the point that perhaps her royalty came about so she could save the Jews at this time. Then again, maybe it was time and chance. The thrust of Mordecai's point was that either way, Esther was responsible to use her position to serve God and God's people.
 - C. We all have different abilities, opportunities, resources, positions and relationships. Perhaps God has given some of these to us for very specific circumstances. Perhaps God has just given them to us in general. Perhaps it was time and chance. The point is whatever the case, we must use these to serve God and serve His people as Peter explained in **I Peter 4:10**.

III. Rely on God.

- A. **Esther** is a very unique and interesting book in one regard. God is not mentioned one single time. However, God is throughout the entire story. When Mordecai suggested that Esther had attained royalty for such a time as this (**Esther 4:14**), who do you think Mordecai was suggesting was responsible for Esther's royalty? When he claimed that deliverance would come from somewhere for the Jews, who was he trusting to bring that deliverance? When Esther wanted the Jews to fast, why did she believe that would help? Mordecai and Esther both saw God in these events and saw the need for God in these events.
- B. Mordecai and Esther both trusted God. They both were placing themselves in God's hands. Neither of them knew exactly how this would turn out. But both of them believed God would deliver His people somehow. Therefore, Esther was willing to say, "And thus I will go into the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (**Esther 4:16**).
- C. Here is the key we learn from Esther. When we do not know how things will turn out, when we do not know how God will use us in any situation, we need to simply trust Him and do things His way. We need to do whatever it takes to glorify Him, serve Him and His people. In the end, God will do what is best. This makes me think of the one talent man in **Matthew 25:14-30**. He was so afraid that what he might do wouldn't work, that he did nothing. Instead of doing nothing, we need to do whatever we can to serve God. God will do what is right by us. Rely on Him.

IV. Be willing to die in God's service.

- A. Perhaps the greatest statement of Esther's is, "If I perish, I perish" (**Esther 4:16**). What surrender to God and His people. When she made this statement, she did not know what the king's attitude would be to her. She might well be signing her death warrant. However, she knew what she was doing was right. She knew it was what God would have her do. She knew that God was not obligated to save her life. She was however, willing to give her life in His service.
- B. That is commitment. Esther teaches us to have that same kind of commitment. We do not always know where serving the Lord and doing things His way will lead us. He has not promised to always deliver us from death. Stephen was stoned. James was killed with the sword. Antipas was martyred. Even Jesus was crucified. But each of these was willing to die for God. Are we?

V. Speak up in God's name.

- A. The final lesson Esther would teach us is that we have to speak up. This was where the rubber finally hit the road with Esther. When she came before the king, she did not immediately make her request. Rather, she asked for Ahasuerus to come to a banquet with her and bring Haman along (**Esther 5:4**). Then while they banqueted, it almost seems as though Esther got a little cold feet. She put off her request another day. She asked that the king and Haman return for another banquet the next day (**Esther 5:7-8**). Finally, on that next day, Esther spoke up and made her request (**Esther 7:1-6**). Until she finally spoke up, God's people were still doomed.
- B. We can do all the praying we can do. We can claim to trust God all day long. We can say we are willing to die. But in the end, the test is will we speak up in God's name. In **John 12:42-43**, many of the rulers in the synagogues believed in Jesus, but they would not confess Him because they wanted the approval of men more than God's approval. Jesus taught that we must confess Him before men if we want Him to confess us before His father (**Matthew 10:32-33**). If we are going to be like Esther, we have to steel our courage and speak up in God's name. That is the crucible in which we prove all the other lessons we learn from Esther.

Conclusion:

What a great example Esther sets. I hope if we learn anything from Esther, we see that an ordinary person with ordinary fears can be great in God's service. Here was a simple Jewish girl who ended up being queen and saved her entire people. We do not have to be extraordinary to accomplish great things for God and His people. We simply have to devote ourselves to prayer, use our position to serve God and His people, rely on God, be willing to die for God and speak up in His name. When we do, God will do amazing things through ordinary Christians like us (**Ephesians 3:20-21**).