

SBC – Sept. 19, 2021
Esther 4:13-17 (NKJV)
“For Such A Time As This”

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Slide # 1

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

Earlier in the year I went through the book of Habakkuk on Sunday nights. Going through a year of Covid I thought its emphasis on “the just shall live by faith” no matter what is coming would be a good emphasis. Then we started considering the Hillside property and as I thought and prayed about it I thought a study on the providence of God as seen in the book of Esther would be good – no matter how things turned out.

Well, as it turned out we had an “**All Church Meeting**” on June 6 and enough money was pledged to go ahead and purchase the property and I didn’t start the study in Esther until about 4 weeks later on July 11. But no matter what the study of Esther which emphasizes the providence of God is good for all times.

Tonight we come to the KEY verse in Esther as found in 4:14 which emphasizes the providence of God but in balance it also emphasizes human responsibility.

The story is set in the context of the Persian Empire. The Jews had been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years but then when Cyrus the Persian was in power he gave an edict that allowed the Jews to return home. This really was the will of God for them. The people of the Promised Land belong in the Land. That is God’s ideal will for them. It has been said that the people of Israel and the land of Israel are like soul and body – they belong together in a living relationship.

But for whatever reasons most of the Jews remained in the vast empire of Persia estranged from their home land. In that pagan context Esther became the pagan king's queen and Mordecai her uncle attained a high position in the king's gate. No one initially knew they were Jews and Mordecai insisted on keeping it a secret.

As the story develops, we find an Agagite named Haman from the people of the Amalekites who were the ancient cursed enemies of the Jews being promoted to second in command in the empire – right next to the king. The king gave a command that everyone should bow before Haman, but Mordecai the Jew refused to do so telling his fellow peers that he was a Jew.

This so angered Haman that he concocted a plan to have all the Jewish people killed on a certain day and then with a little monetary influence he got the king to sign off on a law that called for the execution of all the Jewish people in the kingdom on this particular day.

Mordecai was broken over this development and sent word to Esther about what has happened imploring her to go into the king and make supplication for her people. Esther expressed “pause” saying, to come uninvited into the king's presence could invite death unless he held out the golden scepter; and not only that it had been 30 days since the king had called for her.

Mordecai then responded back to Esther as we find in our study tonight in Esther 4:13-17. We pick the narrative up at Esther 4:13.

Esther 4:13–17 (NKJV)

13 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.

At this point the best of (so to speak) of both Mordecai and Esther come to the fore. Mordecai challenges Esther to not merely think about her own self-interests but to realize that if she doesn't do the right thing it will backfire on her and that she will not escape. Mordecai is telling her that just being the queen won't mean that she will escape from the fate of being a Jew.

No one is secure in his or her own strength in any political system. It is foolish to believe that wealth or position can make us impervious to danger. Deliverance only comes from God. – ***Life Application Bible***

At this point Mordecai applies a little straight talk to bolster the courage of Esther to do what is right. Really, she had no easy choices. She could try to take care of self and die, or she could risk it all to try and save her people – including herself.

There is a time to play it safe, but there is also a time based on conviction to risk it all. Sometimes just playing it safe is not wisdom – just yellowly cowardice. This was a time for courage – to step forward and do the right thing no matter the risk involved.

We now come to the KEY verse in the entire book...

Slide # 2

Esther 4:14 (NKJV)

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?**"

There is a lot packed into this verse. Again Mordecai is telling her this is no time to be silent. Now earlier in 2:10 and 2:20 we find that Mordecai had strictly changed Esther to be quiet and not say a thing about her heritage.

I think God is at work through this whole situation to really shake Mordecai and Esther out of their "***just skate along quietly to get along***" compromised role. God has a way of doing that. All along they should have been standing for convictions that are proper as God's people. But instead in compromise they kept quiet. Now God has put them into a position that He is forcing them to be silent no longer and Mordecai realizes this.

Even though the book makes no reference to God by name yet He is implied everywhere and certainly in this verse. And certainly, here Mordecai implies that God will sovereignly bring deliverance no matter what.

At the same time there is a strong emphasis on human responsibility telling Esther that if she remains silent at this time she and her father's house (namely Mordecai) will perish. Therefore, there is a great balance in this verse between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. In this same light again, we see "deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place" (God's doing) and yet in balance Esther has "come to the kingdom for such a time as this (human responsibility).

Slide # 3**Biblical Balance*****Human Responsibility***

- Remain completely silent
- You have come to the kingdom for...

Divine Sovereignty

- Deliverance will arise
- For such a time as this

There is a time when taking action is not only responsible but the only right thing to do. This was such a time. And Mordecai seems to apply the principle that “you reap according to what you sow” which is a universal principle seen throughout Scripture. Mordecai reasons that to act so selfishly as to think only of self-preservation when the whole of your people are in jeopardy could only reap disaster for such a person.

And so Mordecai challenges Esther with an ultimatum that she must act or perish. She had no other choice. This was a time for courage and action based on principle and such strength is ultimately tied to God and His Word.

Slide # 4**Joshua 1:5–9 (NKJV)**

5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. **I will not leave you** nor forsake you.

6 Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

7 Only be **strong and very courageous**, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

9 Have I not commanded you? **Be strong and of good courage**; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your **God is with you** wherever you go.”

God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. This command is accompanied with God's promise that He would not leave him and that God was with him. Joshua would never be alone. But I think it is important to notice that right in the middle of this emphasis on being strong and courageous is one of the great Bible verses on the place of the Bible in a person's life.

Our strength is ultimately tied to God and His Word. We must resolve to rest in His truth.

We often face a choice. Will we take courage in God and His Word or will we play the coward?

The idea that if Esther refused to act "relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place" seems to be steeped in Biblical theology and a knowledge of God's covenant relationship with His people Israel. This is as fundamental as it gets in terms of sound theology.

If God allows His people Israel to be destroyed it would prove the God of the Bible is a fraud. He is either not a God who has the power to keep His promises or He is not a God who is faithful. In either case YHWH the covenant God of Israel would not be the God of the Bible as depicted in the Bible. He would be an altogether different kind of God.

So it is impossible that the Jews will perish. As Mordecai implied to Esther "***we as a family may perish***" but the Jews as a whole – the Jews as a people group are going to survive purely because of Who God is and His covenant promises to the patriarchs and the people of Israel.

Slide # 5

Jeremiah 31:35–37 (NKJV)

35 Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name):

36 "If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the **seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation** before Me forever."

37 Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel For all that they have done, says the LORD.

God here mentions several things that it is impossible for anyone except God to do. Who can change the reality of night and day? Who can change the ebb and flow of the tide? Who can measure the vast universe of the heavens? Who can search out the inner depths of the earth? The answer is absolutely NO ONE!

Yet, God says if any of these realities can be changed then Israel shall cease from being a nation – which is God’s way of saying this is IMPOSSIBLE! If you can re-route the sun and moon you might have a shot at changing God’s plan regarding Israel. But that has a less than zero percent chance of happening. Therefore, Israel will never cease from being a nation. It’s as sure as God’s promise, as sure as God’s character, as sure as God’s covenant name YHWH!

And Mordecai’s statement reflects this awesome truth. Somehow, in some way God is going to deliver the Jews from annihilation. It had to happen and Mordecai knew it.

And then he floats this possibility to Esther. “***Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?***” He suggests that perhaps God has providentially orchestrated this so that Esther is in just the right place at just the right time to save her people. Perhaps this is her intended destiny and purpose.

Again, the language here is interesting. God is sovereign over all things and yet this reality intersects here with human responsibility.

There are two great intersection truths related to God in this verse: 1) God’s covenant relationship is a guarantee that the Jews will not be completely annihilated – all such plans must fail. 2) God providentially controls all things including the specific purpose that He has for us to fulfill.

And yet as implied by Mordecai we can miss out on the blessing if we don’t respond obediently. God’s plan is never in jeopardy, but we can personally miss out in sharing in the blessing if we are not obedient. Again, we are back to that tension between sovereignty and responsibility (cf. Gen. 45:5-7; 50:20).

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai:

Esther took Mordecai’s challenge to heart and here is her answer.

16 “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!”

What a response. Here is a great example. We have noted the compromise in the Jews in the land generally and even that of Mordecai and Esther as they up to this point were not really willing to take strong stands in keeping with their separated calling as God’s people.

But now Esther in this pressurized context chooses to do what is right. Her resolve is strong. She asked Mordecai to get all the Jews in Shushan to fast for her three days and three nights. And she and her maids will likewise fast.

Prayer is not mentioned but most everybody agrees that it is assumed. Neither God or prayer are mentioned but again both are implied. In times of crisis prayer and fasting were customary in the OT as practiced by the Jews (cf. Deut. 9:9; Judg. 20:26-27; 1 Sam. 1:7-10; 2 Sam. 12:16-17; Ezra 8:21-23; Neh. 9:1-3; Isa. 58:2-5; Jer. 14:12; Joel 1:14; 2:12-17; Dan. 9:3; Jonah 3:6-9; Zech. 7:3-5).

Slide # 6

The omission of any reference to prayer or to God is consistent with the author’s intention; absence of any distinctively religious concepts or vocabulary is a rhetorical device used to heighten the fact that it is indeed God who has been active in the whole narrative.

– ***NIV Study Bible***

This short book describes 10 feasts. The pagans were always feasting it seems in this book (cf. 1:3, 5, 9; 2:18; 9:17-18). The king liked to feast. But here we have fasting indicating sorrow and brokenness before God. The idea of fasting is FOCUS – it is to singularly focus on God to the point of abstaining from normal eating and drinking. It signifies to God that one is totally serious in seeking Him and His direction.

Note that Esther after this intense season of fasting (and assumed prayer) will then go to the king which she plainly says is against the law. To do was to invite death. The only thing that could intervene and save her life in this situation was if the king held out his golden scepter thus overruling the law of death to one that tried to intrude into the king’s presence without an invitation (cf. Esther 4:11).

Note that Paul in Romans 13 informs us that even pagan governments are ordained of God to which the rest of the NT agrees.

Slide # 7

Romans 13:1–2 (NKJV)

1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

1 Peter 2:13–14 (NKJV)

13 Therefore **submit yourselves to every ordinance** of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,

14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

Titus 3:1 (NKJV)

1 Remind them **to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey**, to be ready for every good work,

The emphasis is strong that normally we are to obey those ruling over us. But there are some exceptions presented in Scripture which boil down to these. If the governing authorities command us to act contrary to God and His Word then we must respectfully disobey.

Slide # 8

Acts 5:29 (NKJV)

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

We see in Scripture the precedent of disobeying the government in certain situations. Daniel defied the governments order to stop praying (cf. Dan. 6). The apostles defied the order to stop preaching the gospel (cf. Acts 4:18-19). The midwives defied the governing authority when they were commanded to take the life of children (cf. Ex. 1:15-21). When life is at stake there is a higher law in view. In this case here with Esther the lives of millions of Jews was at stake. In such a case there is a "higher law" in view – which is the law of God based on His truth.

We should always be thoughtful about such things, but when life is at stake not only is it appropriate to disobey, but there is a time when it is absolutely the right thing to do to save lives if it is your power to do so.

Slide # 9

Proverbs 24:11–12 (NKJV)

11 Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.

12 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?

This was a courageous move by Esther. She wisely asked for 3 days of fasting and then she would act with resolve and courage. There was the issue of the law; there was the issue of the king’s uncertain mind; there was the reality of what happened to queen Vashti – indeed there was a lot to dissuade her, but she was resolved.

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 because 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, because going three days without food and drink would not necessarily improve her appearance or physical strength. But “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). – **Warren Wiersbe**

And note she did not know for sure what would happen saying, “if I perish, I perish”. At least she would die trying to save her people. Mordecai also said, “who knows whether you have come to the kingdom of for such a time as this?” They did not know for sure what would happen – even if they did the right thing – even if they looked to God – even if they acted in faith.

This idea that if you just have enough faith it will always go the way of success (humanly speaking) is completely inconsistent with Scripture.

Slide # 10

Hebrews 11:33–37 (NKJV)

33 who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

35 Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

All these acted in faith but some had what would be considered very triumphal outcomes in life and others met their demise only of course to obtain a better resurrection beyond this life.

The point is we don't always know what the will of God will be in any given situation.

Slide # 11**James 4:14–15 (NKJV)**

14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

When Daniel's three friends defied the governments over to be involved in idolatry the king gave them one more chance to bow and this was their response. It is classic.

Slide # 12**Daniel 3:17–18 (NKJV)**

17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve **is able to deliver us** from the burning fiery furnace, and **He will** deliver us from your hand, O king.

18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

This hits just the right balance of faith and yet not presumption. We ultimately don't know how God will act and yet we know that ultimately He works all things together for good to those who love Him (cf. Rom. 8:28).

What we need to do (just like Esther did here) is decide to do the right thing; bath it in prayer; and then trust God for the outcome.

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

God was in control, yet Mordecai and Esther had to act. We cannot understand how both can be true at the same time, and yet they are. God chooses to work through those willing to act for Him. We should pray as if all depended on God and act as if all depended on us.

– ***Life Application Bible***