

SBC – Oct. 10, 2021
Esther 5:1-8 (NKJV)
“Esther Petitions the King”

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

The story of Esther is a story about God’s faithfulness, a story about God’s sovereignty, a story about God’s providential care of His people – really in spite of themselves.

The context relates to the time after the Babylonian Captivity. The Persian king Cyrus had made a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland in Israel. However, many of them for whatever reason remained in the land of Persia. And in that context were pretty well compromised with the culture around them.

In the sovereignty of God Esther had become the queen and Mordecai her cousin had a high position in the king’s court. But they had kept it very quiet about them being Jews least anything jeopardize their positions.

Then a man named Haman who was of the heritage of the Amalekites (the historic and cursed enemies of the Jews) was made second in command of the Persian kingdom and the king gave a command that all should bow before him. Mordecai refused to do so telling his fellow servants that the reason was because he was Jewish (cf. 3:4).

When word of this got back to Haman he was enraged and plotted not only how he might kill Mordecai, but also all the Jews in the land. Mordecai then appealed to Esther to go in and make petition to the king on behalf of her people.

Mordecai strongly exhorted Esther to act and not remain silent.

Slide # 2**Esther 4:14 (NKJV)**

14 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 is the key verse in the book. It underscores the idea of God's providential working which is the idea that God through normal means (versus miraculous means) synchronizes and harmonizes the outworking of things with just the right timing and in just the right way that results in a favorable outcome for His people.

A miracle is God's intervention in which He supersedes the normal laws in a way that has His signature all over it. In His providential workings God also works supernaturally but He does in such a way as to remain anonymous (so to speak).

Actually, God's providential workings are no less of a wonder of awe than His miraculous workings. Both point to His sovereign control over all things. One is just more "showy" and "sensational" in an overt sense, but when you study it, providence is just as awesome. Esther is a book about PROVIDENCE. It about God's perfect timing, His perfect ordering of events and circumstances that results in the preservation of His people – so much so that God's name is not even mentioned in the book – yet His finger prints are all over it.

I love that phrase "for such a time as this". None of us get to decide when we are going to live. We don't decide where we are going to be born or what family background we will have. We didn't choose the country and context we would grow up in. When you really stop and think about it our lives are largely orchestrated by the providential hand of God. Where you are today in life is largely about providence.

We are where we are at this time in history – FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS. We are a God placed people, and yet as Mordecai brought out, within that sphere there is also human responsibility.

I don't pretend to understand exactly how the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility work, only that I know the Bible teaches both. At the end of the day sovereignty trumps everything, and yet human responsibility cannot be erased from the equation.

Esther's response to Mordecai's admonishing challenge is classic.

Slide # 3

Esther 4:16 (NKJV)

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!**”

She asks that her people fast for her and with her and although it is not mentioned it is assumed that the real idea behind the fasting was prayer.

That brings us to chapter 5. Chapters 4-7 present the dramatic climax of the book. Here God's people are preserved through an unlikely set of circumstances that only God could providentially bring about. As we step back, we clearly see the sovereign hand of God at work.

Esther 5:1–8 (NKJV)

1 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.

We saw earlier in chapter 4 (v. 11) that anyone who tried to come into the king's presence uninvited would be killed unless the king held out his golden scepter signifying grace to proceed.

After three days of fasting Esther was now ready to make her move and seek an audience with the king. It was high drama. Her life was literally on the line. And to add to the drama the king had not asked to see her in over a month (4:11).

Esther now set aside her fasting attire and put on her royal robes. She got all dressed up – looking her best for this occasion. This points to human responsibility. She had been fasting (depending on God to work) but then she also acted – doing what she could to get a favorable response from the king. God works – but He also works through human action.

The person who says “God is going to give me a job” but never actively seeks to pursue a job is unbalanced. God generally works through moving objects. We pray and then we act in dependence upon God as He leads.

2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court it must have been an intense moment of high drama wondering how the king would respond. Would it be favorable, or would he be angered by such a forward move?

As we see in the narrative she found FAVOR in the king's sight and he held out to Esther the golden scepter. Many commentators have seen in this a beautiful illustration of God's grace that is being offered to sinners.

Christ holds out the scepter of grace to any unbeliever who comes to Him in repentance and faith. – **William MacDonald**

Slide # 4

John 6:37 (NKJV)

37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me [**Sovereignty**], and the one who comes to Me [**Human responsibility**] I will by no means cast out.

Revelation 22:17 (NKJV)

17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "**Come!**" And let him who hears say, "**Come!**" And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.**

The scepter of GRACE is held out, but we must touch it (that is appropriate it) by FAITH. Grace is offered but it must be received.

Slide # 5

2 Corinthians 6:1–2 (NKJV)

1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you **not to receive the grace of God in vain.**

2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Galatians 3:26 (NKJV)

26 For you are all sons of God **through faith** in Christ Jesus.

To the unbeliever the scepter of grace is extended but just like Esther they must come and when they do GRACE is there for them.

For believers the golden scepter (of extended grace) is always being extended towards us.

Slide # 6

Hebrews 10:19–22 (NKJV)

19 Therefore, brethren, having **boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,**

20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

21 and having a High Priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 4:15–16 (NKJV)

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore **come boldly to the throne of grace,** that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Again, the scepter of grace is continually being extended towards us as believers. Access is granted, but we must come in order to find grace to help in time of need.

Even though Esther found favor with the king in reality what this showed is that Esther had actually found favor with God. God was behind the whole thing.

Slide # 7

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)

1 The **king's heart is in the hand of the LORD,** Like the rivers of water; He **turns it wherever He wishes.**

3 And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!”

It was obvious to the king that Esther wanted something of great importance, or she would not have risked her life to come.

Indeed, she did find favor in the king's sight as he asks her what her request was saying "It shall be given to you – up to half the kingdom!" Now my sense of humor wants to say, "**Well, thank you Mr. king that sounds wonderful - let's call it a deal and draw up the lines right after lunch.**"

In reality this was in effect an idiom expressing the king's great willingness to grant her any request so long as it was within reason.

4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

Esther didn't really answer the king, she simply invited him and Haman to a banquet that she had prepared for them – with the implied understanding that she would elaborate on her request at that time.

5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

The king was all about it. The king ordered Haman to come quickly so that they might do as Esther requested and go to the prepared banquet. And so they did.

There is a lot about feasting in the book. It is obvious the king LOVED to eat. They say that "**the way to a man's heart is through his stomach**". Esther seems to be applying that approach here.

6 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

Well, they got to the banquet and once again the king pressed Esther saying, "What is your petition?" telling her once it again it shall be granted up to the half of his kingdom. The king is really promising to do it.

On the surface it seems like this might be a really good time to bring forth her petition. After all the king has asked her TWICE offering her half the kingdom. In verse 6 there is a double affirmative emphasis: "It shall be granted you." and again, "It shall be done!" It sounds like Esther has him exactly where she wants him to be.

However, she delays. Note what she says in verses 7-8.

**7 Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request is this:
8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”**

Esther here stalls saying she will tell the king her petition at yet another banquet she is inviting him to on the next day. She very diplomatically asks the king to come to yet another banquet tomorrow.

Now I know the king likes banquets, but this is getting to be a little much. How many banquets does he have to attend to find out what the queen wants? Well, as it turns out just one more.

This whole part of the narrative is filled with high drama. It was risky going into the king, it was risky putting the king off and making him wait.

But the question remains WHY did Esther not tell the king at the first banquet? WHY did she delay. There have been no end of ideas here but nothing is totally definitive – although I like one suggestion more than the others.

Some think she may have gotten cold feet and really is considering not telling him at all. In the heat of the moment, they say she wilted and did not have the courage to follow through.

Some think she thought this was too abrupt for such a major petition and that she needed some more time to butter the king up before bringing it out.

Others think that she may have sensed the timing was not right. For whatever reason she just didn't think it was the right timing. Perhaps she sensed the king's frame of mind was not quite right.

Another suggestion is that it wasn't the right place. Perhaps other attendants were around and she wanted a more private setting.

These and many other suggestions are made but the one that makes the most sense to me is as follows. And I am not dogmatic about this because the text does not specifically say, but there is a contextual reason to think this may be the case.

We know that Esther and all the Jews in the capital city had been fasting (and without the text saying so) actually seeking God on this matter.

Slide # 8

Her deferment was perhaps because she was possibly waiting for a sign of God's involvement. This sign was in the event which took place between the two banquets, that is Mordecai's public elevation over Haman. – ***The Moody Bible Commentary***

This is a major part of the story as spelled out in chapter 6 and happened between the first and the second banquet. So very possibly Esther was waiting on a providential indicator that God was indeed in this and when Mordecai was promoted overnight it gave her the affirmation she was looking for in order to proceed.

Perhaps! Again, I am not dogmatic about this but contextually it makes a lot of sense.

Marvelous indeed are God's ways with men, for the intervening events as recorded in chapter 6 provided the necessary demotion of Haman and the corresponding increase of Esther's confidence in God's direction in the course of events for her to accurse Haman openly at the second banquet. – ***John Whitcomb***

Do we not do this today? We wait on God to providentially open and close doors. We did that with this very building we are meet in tonight. There were many situations where we made a move and then waited to see how God might providentially work and so we moved forward one step at a time – all the time waiting on God and looking to Him to make the way clear. "Clarity" was our byword in those days.

And looking back, I think we pretty much all agree that God has led us so very clearly to where we are today. I will never forget how the morning after our all-church meeting when we saw we had the funds to counter-offer and buy it we QUICKLY countered bright and early that Monday morning. And I will long remember how the competing realtor came to me and said "I was just ready to submit the bid for my agency and I looked up on the computer screen to see that the sale was PENDING!"

He said to me, "You guys must have been praying harder." I didn't argue! We all know it was God's providential working. Even he seemed to realize this was a God-thing!

Providence is all about timing and God's precise ordering of events. It is a thing of wonder to behold, and we worship Him for how He works to bring Himself glory.

Whether Esther was looking for a sign or not, God clearly providentially intervened between the two banquets (cf. 5:4-8 and 6:14-7:1).

Do you want a picture of providence?

Slide # 9



The people in those cars that narrowly averted disaster with this jet airliner, not to mention the people on the plane, are a good illustration of how God providentially orchestrates the preservation of His people. All the precise details had to align just right.

Is it just all “luck” that preserves God’s people? Absolutely not! This is the providential working of God. Providence is a GOD-THING!

Psalm 75:1 (NKJV)

1 We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near.

Indeed, we give thanks to God for His wondrous works proving His providential interaction in the lives of His children. What a wonderful God! He so graciously intervenes continually in our lives.

Indeed, his wondrous works show that His name (His Person) is near!