

- We are in week three of our OT character study series
 - We are examining the lives of certain people from the OT history in order to see how they interacted with God, how they responded to him, what they did, what they said and thought.
 - In doing so, we get a window into how we ourselves can and should respond to the activity of God in the world and in us.
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- Who has most influenced your life? When you think back, who were the people who shaped the direction your life took?
 - Who are those people for you?
 - Now, maybe a harder question. Where have you done this for others? Whose lives changed direction in a positive direction because of you?
 - If we're lucky, someone has shared that with us. Or perhaps we have seen it. Sometimes we have even seen the tangible results of something we invested in.
 - Most of the time though, you will not fully understand your impact on others in this life.
 - The temptation is often to think you have no impact, that you are going through life leaving no wake.
 - But, the reality is that **GOD HAS PUT YOU WHERE YOU ARE FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.**
 - All you can influence positively the lives around you if you have the courage to step into it.
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- This is demonstrated in the story of Esther. To understand Esther, we have to place it in historical context.
 - It takes place between 483-473 BCE
 - 100 years earlier Israel had been captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile.
 - 70 years after that, many of the exiles had returned to their homeland (we read about this in Nehemiah and Ezra) but many had ignored the call to return home and had stayed in Persia.
 - Babylon had been conquered and replaced by Persia as the dominant world power and this is the land that many Israelites are still living in.
 - The events of Esther primarily take place in the capital city of Susa.
 - But there are some interesting facts about this bible book.
 - Esther is the only book in the bible where God is never mentioned.
 - The New Testament does not quote from Esther at all. It is one of the few books not found among the Dead Sea scroll collections
 - The law is never mentioned nor are sacrifices or offerings referred to.
 - Prayer is never mentioned, although fasting is.
 - There is a great deal of moral ambiguity in the book, with much drinking, violence and sex.
 - We don't have the time to read the entire account of Esther this morning (although I would highly recommend it during your quiet time with God this week) so I am going to go through it fairly quickly and then highlight a few key things that we can take from this book.
- 1:1 This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush : 2 At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, 3 and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.*
- The king was uber rich and liked to party. There is evidence from other sources that indicate Xerxes drinking, parties and his anger were well known.
 - In this case, it seemed as though he wanted to exhibit to all the important people how amazingly rich and powerful he was, so he had 6 months worth of partying and feasting.

- It was an exercise in power and indulgence for the elite in society.
- At the end, he did a one week party blowout that was open to the whole city. This is where they let out all the stops.

1:8 By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

- The men were partying. The women were also partying with the queen in the palace.
- On the last day, the king was quite drunk, and decided he wanted to parade his wife, Vashti, in front of all his friends because she was gorgeous, so he sends for her. Predictably, she refuses.
- Xerxes is embarrassed in front of his guests and is furious.
- He consulted his closest advisors and they advise that he cannot let this go unpunished as it would cause chaos.
- They recommend he banish the queen and set an edict that all men everywhere are in charge of their households.
- He agrees. Vashti is gone. His honor is satisfied. But when he calms down, he realizes that he misses his wife. He is lonely.
- To they look to replace the queen. They had a whole nation of beautiful women to choose from, so they engage in a year long beauty and talent pageant to find the perfect woman for the king. They would undergo beauty treatments and preparations to go to the king. Each woman would have one night to work her magic and the prize was to become wife to the king with riches, power and influence to the winner.
- The stage is set and now the main characters are introduced.

2:5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

- Esther became one of the women taken to the citadel to vie for the king's affections. We gains the favor of the attendants preparing the women, so she gets special counseling, special beauty treatments, her own top notch women advisors, and when her turn came, she did exactly that the king's eunuch advised.
- She won the favor of everyone she met. Most importantly, she won the favor of the king who decided his search was over, and he declared her the queen and had a great feast to celebrate. But . . .

2:10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

- The author then gives us a little sidebar on Mordecai. He was a servant of the king and overheard an assassination plot. He told Esther who told the king (giving all the credit to Mordecai) and they found it was true, executed the would-be assassins, and recorded in the king's records what Mordecai had done.
- It's like a fairy tale. An Disney Aladdin-esque rise to prominence. All is great.
- And now we are introduced to the villain.

3:1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

- Haman, a Canaanite descendent, was the king's right hand guy. He loved it. He wanted to be honored and have people grovel to him.
- When Mordecai would not, he was furious.

3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

- He did not just want to destroy Mordecai, but everyone of Mordecai's people. Hundreds of thousands of people.
- So he sweet talked the king into thinking the Jews were a minority that was a danger to the empire and should be exterminated, and he rolled a dice, called a pur, to decide the date when the extermination should take place and the king issued the edict that legalized this impending genocide.
- The nation is confused. They don't know where this is coming from. But the Jews realize the danger they are in. So we come to chapter 4, the pivot point for entire story.
- Mordecai heard about the edict and went immediately to Esther. He showed her a copy of the edict and asked her to go to the king to beg for their people. Her response?

4:11 *"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."*

- She might be the queen, but she couldn't just waltz in to see the king and ask him for stuff. She had to be summoned. Look what happened to the last queen. If she went outside protocol and irritated the king, she could easily be executed and he would just find another to take her place.
- Here we come to the core of the entire story of Esther.

12 *When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

- You are where you are because this was God's intention. You are uniquely placed to make a difference. Don't shrink back now.
- You could see Esther hearing this, giving a big sigh, then squaring her shoulders as she sends her reply to Mordecai, the one who was like a father to her.

4:15 *Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

I. For such a time as this . . .

- History calls these pivot points.
- Points on which what happens next pivots and goes in a different direction.
- The reformation, which changed the entire world, began when one man took issue with the church's abuses of the day and tacked up 95 statements on the door of the church in Wittenburg.
- The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28th June 1914 started a chain of events that led to a world wide war that killed 40 million people.
- There are thousands of these types of events.
- Many of the greatest preachers, theologians, and influencers can point to specific people and events that changed the course of their lives.

- In fact, I have listened to many of your stories, and like mine, they pivot on specific words or events at specific times.
 - I can look back over my life and point out key people who significantly shaped what I thought or decisions I made. Most of us can.
 - But do you ever pause to think of it from the other side? Think of your life situation right now.
 - Why are you positioned where you are?
 - Why do you work where you work?
 - Why do you live where you live?
 - Why do you go to school where you go to school?
 - Why does Hope Chapel continue to exist?
 - Have you ever stopped to consider that whatever situation you are in right now is because God has put you there “FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”
 - All of the events of Esther’s life, good and bad, put her in a position to do something. To have an influence. To change an outcome.
 - And as we saw two weeks ago with Abraham, her answer was to give God her “yes.”
 - Accepting the consequences, but doing what she knew she should do.
- So three days later Esther put on her best royal robes and approached the throne room of the king.
 - As it happened, he was thrilled to see her. He extended his scepter and she approached and touched it. He must have been in a tremendous mood because he asked her for a request, and expansively said he would give it to her, even if it was half the kingdom. This was her opportunity. To say what she needed.
 - But Esther was more clever than this – she told the king she wanted to have dinner with him and Haman, the king’s trusted advisor, just the three of them.
 - So they did. The king sent for Haman and the three of them had an amazing dinner banquet together. After it was done, the king asked again, what do you want? She again had the opportunity but she was stoking the fire and simply asked the king and Haman to come again to another dinner the next night at which she would tell the king everything.
 - Now here is where the story takes a crazy turn. Haman was feeling good. He had money, and power, had been the only one invited to dinner with the king and queen. He even had his revenge planned on Mordecai and his people. The problem was that this was still the better part of a year away and Mordecai was still not bowing to him.

5:13 But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”

- So his family told him to go that very night to set up a pole, go to the king, and get his permission to impale Mordecai on it the next day.
- As this is going on, the king is having trouble sleeping. So he asked for some bedtime reading by having his officials read some of the records of his reign to him. When they came to the story of Mordecai saving him from assassination, he asked how Mordecai had been honored and found nothing had ever been done.
- Just as he is thinking about this, Haman arrived to ask the king if he could kill Mordecai. Before he can say anything, the king asked him:

6:6 “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”

- Of course, having just been at dinner with the king and queen, figured that the Xerxes must be talking about him, so gave an elaborate answer of how this person should be put on the king’s horse, with the king’s robes and king’s crown and have him led around by a highly placed noble proclaiming how the king delights to honor one like this.

6:10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

- Haman is humiliated. He is mortified. And after he has done all this, he barely has time to change and go to dinner again with the king and queen.
- At the dinner, the king asks again what he could give Esther, and in a moment filled with drama, she asks:

7:3 "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. 4 For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated.

- The king asked, "Who would dare to do such a thing?" and in a dramatic amazing moment, Esther points to Haman and says, "This vile Haman."
- The king is so angry he storms off and Haman realizes he must beg for mercy from the queen and so he falls over her trying to beg and at the moment the king returns and believes that Haman is trying to rape the queen.
- His doom is sealed and Haman is impaled on the very spike Haman had made for Mordecai.
- Since the king could not alter his own decree, he issued a second one that gave the Jews the right to defend themselves and even attack those that wanted them dead.
- When the day came, first in the capital and then in the rest of the country, the Jews rose up, defended themselves and slaughtered the very people who were going to exterminate them, including all of Haman's sons.

- In the end, Mordecai was elevated to the king's right hand and the book ends this way.

3 Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

- The celebration of Purim is still celebrated to this day. Pur (being the dice used by Haman to decide their destruction) and it is being celebrated on March 9-10 this year.

II. God is working even when I don't see it.

- Esther just happened to find favor with the manager of the harem to get the best treatment.
- Esther just happened to catch the eye of the king among many women.
- Mordecai just happened to overhear a plot to kill the king.
- The roll of the dice to kill the Jews just happened to set a date a full 11 months later from when the original edict was sent out to give maximum time.
- The king just happened to not be able to sleep the night Haman would ask for Mordecai's death.
- Haman just happened to be the one in the courtyard when the king would honor Mordecai.
- The queen just happened to be a Jew when the lives of the Jewish people were threatened.
- Haman just happened to be begging for his life in a bad posture when the king came back in and it sealed his fate.
- God is always working. And what is the most encouraging is that he is working even in the midst of poor choices and moral ambiguity.
- Just because you have made poor choices in your past does not mean that God does not have you in exactly the place you are for such a time as this.
- He is bigger than your circumstances. Bigger than your choices. He weaves his story through all of it.
- **GOD HAS PUT YOU WHERE YOU ARE FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.**

- He modeled this for us in his son Jesus.
- Jesus came for such a time as this.
- Where Esther was there to save the Jewish people from annihilation, Jesus came to save all of humanity from destruction.
- When the time was right, Jesus came. Born of a virgin. Raised in a backwater village. To disciple 12 men who would change the world. To die to bring us into his family and give us access to the heavenly Father.
- **GOD HAS PUT YOU WHERE YOU ARE FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.**
- No one else can do what he has for you. If you do not, God may well bring about what wants through someone or something else, but you will miss out and you may well suffer because of it.
- So don't shrink back. Step in. Because **GOD HAS PUT YOU WHERE YOU ARE FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.**