

Let's Worship God

6th-11th August 2018

Esther



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Monday - Esther 4:1-3 - Disaster

What a wretched scene: sackcloth, ashes, and a cry that could curdle blood. Yet this scene was not an exception; Mordecai's heart was one of many that had been broken by Haman's wickedness.

Surely it shouldn't have been that way? That's what some would have you believe. There are many "Christian" preachers and authors who specialise in telling their audiences exactly what they want to hear. "Just have faith", they say, "and life will be good. If your faith is strong, you'll reap the reward." The God they proclaim is like an upgraded Santa Claus: just do enough to reach the nice list and he'll make your wishes come true.

But what if your job prospects don't improve? What if your family problems or your health issues get worse? What if life as you know it turns completely sour? If it happened to Mordecai, it can happen to you.

There are two possibilities and they're both too awful to contemplate. Either God has failed you, or you have failed God. Either you don't trust God enough, or God's not worthy of your trust. Whichever it is, there's not much reason for hope.

The Book of Esther shows us a third option. The almighty God doesn't exist for our comfort; we exist for his glory. The all wise one has a plan that is beyond our understanding. Those "prosperity preachers" don't like to admit it, but sometimes God's plan involves sackcloth, ashes, and unspeakable pain.

Is that what you've been called to face? There is a purpose behind even your bitterest tears: the glory of God himself. Mordecai walked the valley of the shadow of death so God's name would be magnified in his eventual rescue.

Not every Christian is called to a comfortable life, a productive life, or even a long life. Every Christian is called to display the glory of Christ and to cherish that glory above all else. That's what the gospel is all about (2 Corinthians 4:4). Your tears can be part of that glory.

Questions

1. What happens when we forget that we exist for God's glory?
2. Can you think of some ways that you can bring glory to God this week?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how God uses even your pain in order to magnify his name.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 43 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Tuesday - Esther 4:4-14 - Destiny [Part 1]

The situation was hopeless. The date had been determined, the decree had been dispatched. Before the year was out, every Jewish man, woman, and child would be wiped from the face of the earth.

An optimist might have protested that it isn't over until it's over. A realist would have responded that the holocaust was sure to go ahead as planned: Haman's cunning and the king's ego ensured that there could be no turning back.

"But!", the optimist might say, "maybe someone can sway events. Two Jews still have a voice within the regime." A realist wouldn't have gotten his hopes up. Mordecai's heroism had been forgotten while some other girl was warming Esther's side of the bed (v11).

There was no room for optimists in Susa. However, there is always room for faith. Mordecai was both a man of tears and a man of trust. He knew that the optimists were clutching at straws. He knew they were sticking their heads in the sand. Yet he also knew that hope was not completely lost.

Read v14 and you'll see what I mean. Notice especially the two key words: IF and WILL. Mordecai had a plan up his sleeve (v8), but no guarantee that it would even get off the ground. Sure, Esther might manage to get the king's attention, but that involved a big fat IF.

Yet, even if she didn't step forward, Mordecai had no doubt that "deliverance WILL arise for the Jews" (v14). Of that much Mordecai was certain. How did he know this? Because it was their destiny. Not destiny in the fuzzy Hollywood sense; destiny in the concrete biblical sense. The Jews may have had an enemy who had resolved to destroy them, but more importantly they had a God who had pledged himself to protect them. God wasn't finished with his people.

Tomorrow we'll see some of the anchors that kept Mordecai from being swept away. For now, just keep this in mind: as one of God's people, you have a destiny to remember.

Questions

1. Why might Mordecai's plan (v8) work? Why might it not?
2. What is the difference between blind optimism and true faith?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would give you a clear mind and concrete faith when you face times of crisis.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 44 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Wednesday - Esther 4:14 - Destiny [Part 2]

Do you remember what we saw when we began the story of Esther? God is never mentioned in the book, yet his fingerprints are all over it. It doesn't take a forensic scientist to see those fingerprints in v14.

Mordecai was far from a blind optimist, yet he was surprisingly confident about the future. Since he wasn't one for wishful thinking, what could possibly lie behind this verse? It must have been faith.

Mordecai would have known many of God's promises from the Old Testament. He knew that one of Abraham's offspring would be a blessing to all the nations (Genesis 12:3). He knew that one of David's descendants would rule wisely and forever (2 Samuel 7:16). He knew that the Saviour was coming to triumph over evil and he knew that this saviour would be from the Jewish line (Genesis 3:15). He also knew that those promises had not yet come to fruition. Mordecai knew that God's people had a destiny. He knew that God is faithful to his word.

The details were murky, but the principle was clear: deliverance will come. When God makes a promise, he never throws in the towel.

There's a lesson in this for us. So often, aren't we tempted to despair? We need to understand that the Jews of Esther's day and the Christians of today need exactly the same antidote: we need to remember our destiny.

When we see the weakness of the church and the power of our opponents we need to remember our saviour's promise: the gates of hell will not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18). When we agonise over our sin and abandon hope of ever making progress, we must remember that Christ's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9). When we are repulsed by the world around us and feel we just can't go on, we must remember what God has in store (Revelation 21:4).

Will you follow in Mordecai's footsteps? Don't despair and don't lose hope. You have a destiny to remember.

Questions

1. When are you most tempted to despair or give up?
2. Are there any promises about the future that help you to keep on going?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would help you to store up his word in your heart so you are ready for the time of crisis.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 45 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Thursday - Esther 4:12-17 - Dilemma

"I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened." Those were the despairing words of Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo's terrifying mission required a journey into the very heartland of evil, into the fiery bowels of Mount Doom. An agonising death was the most likely outcome. That was Frodo's dilemma. I'm glad it wasn't me.

As Frodo fretted, his dear friend Gandalf responded. "So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to do is decide what to do with the time that is given to us." The message was simple: it's an awful predicament to be in, but all you can do is resolve to do what's right.

JRR Tolkien may well have had Esther in mind as he wrote that section of *Lord of the Rings*. The parallels are uncanny: Esther had a terrifying task before her. She was to go to the very nerve centre of the empire in a bid to save her friends. If she didn't go evil seemed certain to triumph. If she did go there was every chance she would lose her life. What a dilemma!

It's far from certain that Ahasuerus would be pleased to see her. To show up uninvited would be to take her life in her hands. History tells us that Ahasuerus had executed people for less. Esther wished this had never happened. I'm just glad it wasn't me.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations we can't escape from. Sometimes the circumstances are utterly beyond our control. The only thing we can control is how we will respond. Like Esther, we face the dilemma that has tormented God's people through the ages: will I walk in God's ways or will I play it safe? God tells us that if we follow him we will not be put to shame (Psalm 25:3). Esther was about to put this to the test (v16). Will you do the same?

Questions

1. Are you currently facing a dilemma? What does God's word say about it?
2. Do God's promises seem more real when we play it safe or step out in faith?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for friends or family members who are currently facing dilemmas. Pray that God would give them the resolve to walk in his ways.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 46 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Friday - Esther 4:14 - Decision

WHY? Why did those men snatch me away from home? Why was I poked and prodded and violated over and over again? Why am I trapped with no way out? WHY? No doubt this young, vulnerable Jewish girl agonised over that question. Have you wrestled with it too? Why is my boss so unreasonable? Why did the car break down when I'm least able to afford it? Why has my blood test come back positive? Why is my treatment not working? Why was that loved one taken from me? WHY? If you're agonising over that question, be encouraged by today's verse.

First of all, be encouraged by what Mordecai doesn't say. He doesn't claim to have all the answers. Perhaps as you consider the painful circumstances you find yourself in, you can't find answers either. That doesn't mean you're not spiritual enough; it means that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

Secondly, be encouraged by what Mordecai does say. He may not have all the answers, but he does see the big picture. God hasn't been taken by surprise.

Perhaps with hindsight you'll see God's workings clearly; perhaps you'll never get the answers that you crave. God doesn't owe us an explanation, yet in his grace he tells us all that we need to know. The key question isn't "WHY?". It's "WHO?". Whose fingerprints are over every page of this book? Whose plan endured when Esther's life was turned upside down? Who stands behind the scenes of your life, carefully ordaining every twist and turn? Who has pledged himself to his people, guaranteeing that all things work together for their good? (Romans 8:28) The covenant keeping God. Esther's God. Your God.

Grasp that and see suffering differently. It's not taken away, but you can look at your agony with fresh eyes. What might God be accomplishing through it? What fruit is he cultivating within you? How is he demonstrating the gospel to your unbelieving friends? Perhaps you've been called to suffer for such a time as this.

Questions

1. Are you going through a time of trial? What opportunities has God provided through your trial?
2. Is it possible to waste those opportunities? How could you do that?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that God would give you a Christlike perspective on suffering. Pray that you would see God's providence and that the opportunities to witness and become more like your Saviour.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 47 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Esther

Saturday - Esther 5:1-4 - The Girl Who Played With Fire

Pythius was a friend of Ahasuerus. He had shown him lavish hospitality and if there was a man who was in the king's good books, it was him. But Pythius had a problem, so he braced himself to approach to the king. Pythius was cryptic at first: he explained how his request would cost the king very little, but would mean the world to him. He pleaded with the king to grant his request; but he didn't tell him what that request would be. This was a huge mistake.

Ahasuerus happily agreed. He was fond of Pythius and he owed him a debt of gratitude. "Of course I'll give you what you want!" So Pythios made his request. He had five sons, each of whom was due to march as part of the king's army. Understandably, Pythios was worried-if disaster struck, his family would be annihilated. So, his perfectly reasonable request was simple: "let one, just one of my five sons stay at home. Don't make him march to war."

You can read about it in history books: Ahasuerus was incensed! The problem was that he had already promised to do whatever Pythius asked. So, the king kept his word... with a twist. Pythius' son was sawn in two, with the army marching between the two pieces. He didn't go to war after all. That's one of many stories from outside the Bible that tell us something we already knew: Ahasuerus was not to be messed with! Even close friendship would not save you if you crossed this man. Pythius played with fire. Pythius got burned.

Now Esther must play with fire. She adopts a high risk strategy in this passage, following a similar path to Pythius years before. She asks for the king's help... but doesn't tell him what she actually wants. This has the potential to be catastrophic. Will Esther get burned? There's only one way this will work: if there's one greater than Ahasuerus behind the scenes. It all hinges on God. Can you see him at work?

Questions

1. Can you think of ways that Esther's plan might have gone wrong?
2. How would you have felt as you waited for the king to stretch out his golden sceptre?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for how God upheld Esther when dealing with one of the most wicked men in history. Give thanks for how, if he can uphold Esther, he can uphold you too in whatever you face.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

Then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; Psalm 124:3

Praise: Psalm 48 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

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