

Heroes of the Faith  
Esther: The Problem of Opportunity  
Esther 4:11-17

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It's one of those books that some people doubt belongs in the Bible. Neither Luther nor Spurgeon would write a commentary about it. It's full of sex and seduction, blackmail and attempted genocide. The Book of Esther never mentions the name of God and no one can be found praying. So how did such a book find its way into the Holy Scripture? Maybe only one thing: The courageous act of a pretty woman who wound up saving a nation.

Our last Old Testament hero is Esther, the Queen of Persia, a Jewish girl with a hidden identity, an orphan raised by a wise uncle named Mordecai. She became queen by winning a Miss Persia contest with the only judge being King Xerxes. I don't know if it was love at first sight or passion at the first look, nevertheless, Esther finds herself in the lap of luxury. Now every good story has a villain. The villain in this story is a man by the name of Haman. He couldn't stand the fact that Mordecai refuses to give him due respect by bowing whenever the honorable Haman passes by. So hate and bitterness in the heart of one with power and money, winds up with a edict from the king to exterminate the Jews. This is where Esther comes in. She alone has the power and influence to sabotage the plan and Mordecai, her uncle, sends Esther this message, which I take for a text today:

Verse 4:14 says, *"And who knows but that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* There are just two things I want to mention on the way to Holy Communion.

**IT'S NOT ABOUT US; IT'S ABOUT THE KINGDOM.**

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven." We pray it every Sunday. All the while I wonder if there is not another conversation going on under our breath. That prayer goes something like this:

Lord, how many times do I need to ask before you respond?

Lord, if you will grant this one wish, I will never ask for another thing in all my life.

Jesus, if you can't make me thin, could you at least make other people look a little fatter?

Jesus, I know you are not into material things, but if you help me win the lottery, I'll be glad to tithe my winnings to the Church.

Do you ever pray prayers like that?

Rick Warren opens his popular book The Purpose Driven Life with these words:

“It’s not about you!” Life is not about the job you hold, the place you live, the money you have. The purpose of life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your own happiness. It’s not about you and it’s not about me.

I wept this past weekend as a church in our community exploded over a power struggle between its pastor and its elders. While I know none of the details, my heart breaks when the Body of Christ suffers like that. Let us all be in prayer for Bellevue Community Church and let us learn a vital lesson about church. Church is not about you, it’s not about me. When my poor, lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave, this congregation will continue to be a vibrant, growing, disciple-making community of faith as it has been for the past one hundred and fifty-five years because the church is about God, it’s not about any individual.

The real question is this: What on earth am I doing for Heaven’s sake? What am I doing that matters in the light of eternity? What investments am I making in people that will make a difference when I’m gone? Have I discovered something worth dying for? Or even better, have I discovered something worth living for? Esther says, “*I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish*” (4:16). Do you have that kind of passion about something in life? It’s not about us; it’s about the Kingdom of God on earth.

**IT’S NOT ABOUT CONVENIENCE; IT’S ABOUT OPPORTUNITY.** Who knows but that you have come to the Kingdom, for such a time as this?

Many of you know my affection for Tim McGraw’s song, “*Live Like You Are Dying*.” I try to do that every day! I love Tom Wilson’s cartoon when *Ziggy* says, “Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow may not come. That’s why we call today the Present.” Why not live a *carpe diem* kind of life? If there is any good you can do, any difference you can make, neither defer it nor neglect it; do it now. If you can help somebody as you travel along, if you can cheer somebody with a word or a song, if you can keep somebody from traveling wrong—then do it now.

I’m told the Chinese characters for *crisis* are two. One means danger; the other means opportunity. While life threatens us with danger, it also affords us wonderful opportunities. Some of our finest opportunities come in the most difficult of circumstances in our lives.

I was standing on an elevator at Centennial Hospital the other day. Believe me, I would much rather be making hospital calls than having someone calling on me. When the door shut, there were two of us in the elevator and I was feeling self-conscious with my new hair-do. The other person in the elevator was a young man, maybe twenty-five to thirty. When the door closed with only the two of us, he spoke up and said, “How are you feeling?” “So, so,” I said. “I know, my dad has cancer too,” he continued. “I will be praying for you.” The door opened and I stepped off and I stopped; I was touched. He didn’t have to do that; he had

troubles enough of his own. He didn't know me from Adam. Yet, in the time it takes for an elevator to climb a few floors, he seized the opportunity to care for me, a stranger. It's not a matter of convenience; it's a matter of opportunity.

Thank God for some positive news in the paper this week and on the newscasts. A Brentwood fire fighter, his wife and two children have a new home up in Hendersonville. Amy Hawkins lost the use of her legs when she took the hit of the tornado last spring that destroyed their home. Thanks to her quick thinking, sacrificial act of love, her two small children Cole and Jair are fine. This week the *Extreme Makeover crew*, along with thousands of volunteers, built the Hawkins family a new home. Seize the day, grab the moments, take the opportunity, life is not a matter of convenience, it's a matter of opportunity. Who knows, but that you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this for today.

At West Point young cadets gather in the Chapel and offer this prayer to Almighty God. "Make us choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never be contented with the half truth when the whole truth can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when right and truth are in jeopardy." The world could use more people willing to live prayers like that.

The Jews have a feast to celebrate this deliverance that Esther facilitated. They call it Purim. It's a joyous holiday full of gift giving, food and drink. In the synagogue there are songs of joy and revelry, not normally allowed in the Temple. Why, because God one day saw fit to deliver them because one woman, at the risk of her life decided to do what was right. Let us never forget such acts of bravery and let us ponder deep in our own souls that probing question of Mordecai "*And who knows, but that you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this.*" Amen.

