

## For Such a Time as This

It is good to be back with you, and to be back in Susa with Esther and Mordecai. When we left them last, the plot by Haman had been hatched and approved, and the letters to all 127 provinces had been sent out. “Eleven months from now, each of you are to strap on your swords and find and destroy every single Jew, whether young or old men, women, and children.” Esther was absent from chapter 3, but she is back on stage again and will make the hardest decision of her young life. And the most important one. The existence of the nation of Israel was at stake, and the very lineage of Jesus was being threatened.

On June 18, 1940, Winston Churchill stood before the House of Commons just before the Battle of Britain would begin and Germany would attempt to destroy any resistance in England, and Churchill said this: “But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new dark age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, **This was their finest hour.**”

We will see Esther’s finest hour, as we examine this chapter under these three headings: Mordecai the broken, Hathach the broker, and Esther the brave. You will see that this chapter, like the one before it, is very much like a chess match, only this time the two players are Mordecai and Esther, but they are not sitting down at the same chess board or even at the same table. Therefore it is necessary for someone, in this case Hathach the servant to the queen, to run back and forth between the two, reporting to each player what the other’s last move was.

### • **Mordecai the broken**

- The first response Mordecai had to the genocidal decree was to tear his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. In the Old Testament, it was either an expression of intense grief and mourning, or deep repentance. The person would tear his garments and put on sackcloth, which was a coarse material made of goat’s hair and very uncomfortable to wear. Then he would sit in ashes, and pour ashes on his head, which represented desolation and ruin. This is what Jacob did when he thought that his son Joseph was dead. This is what the whole city of Ninevah did after Jonah had preached to them that in 40 days they would be destroyed. Tearing the clothes and putting on sackcloth was an outward sign of an inward condition.
- Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes not to show off but to express his grief over sin. Then he did something else: he went into the middle of the city and he cried out, and went to the entrance of the king’s gate and sat down. Brokenness leads to prayer and also to action. We were with men and women in S. Africa last week, Young Ohm, Roche van Wyk, and Mark and Marcie Harris, who did not just see the needs in that country and commit to pray about them. They are actively working, as led by the Lord, to do something about the needs. Mordecai saw the need, cried out to God, and then acted. He put himself at the king’s gate, in position to be an influence over others, especially those in authority. Notice what he didn’t do. He didn’t cross the line. He didn’t go past the gate, because that would have been suicide, and would have helped no one. Verse 2, no one was allowed to enter the gate in sackcloth. He didn’t go past it. But he ALSO didn’t just say flippantly, “God is sovereign. Everything is going to be ok,” and go about his business as if nothing had changed.
- Well, when Esther heard about what Mordecai was doing, she sent him some clothes. This is almost funny, isn’t it? It means that Esther had no idea what was going on all over the kingdom, and especially with her own father. She was isolated from the life of the people. Living in the palace with nothing to do, really, except eat and sleep and try to look queenly, but she was a queen without a king: he hadn’t asked for her in 30 days. She was out of touch. Esther heard her father had torn his clothes and was sitting in sackcloth and ashes, so she sent him some clothes to change into, as if Mordecai was just tired of his

wardrobe and wanted something new. "That will cheer him up!" It's true that's the way many choose to deal with pain. "I'll go buy some new clothes. That's what I need. That will make me feel better." But that was not going to solve Mordecai's grief.

- This is when the chess match began. He refused the clothes. Disobeyed his queen. So she orders Hathach, her trusted servant, a eunuch who had been assigned to her, to go and find out what is going on: verse 5: "what this was and why it was."
- **Hathach the broker**
- There's not much to say about him except that he was obviously trusted. Mordecai tells him what he is doing and why, and in verse 8 he even tells him that Esther needs to go to the king and plead with him "on behalf of her people." Keep in mind that no one inside the palace knows that Esther is a Jew except Esther. And now Mordecai reveals that information to Hathach. Not only that, but Mordecai says to Esther, in essence, "What I told you to keep to yourself before doesn't apply any more. You are going to have to reveal who you really are. The time for a hidden identity is over. You have to come into the light about everything in your life." Listen, saints. There may be someone here this morning who is living a double-life. You have your public face and your public beliefs that everybody sees and hears. But then you have your private thoughts and your private actions that you keep hidden, and nobody knows about them. There will come a time when God will force you into the open, to reveal who you really are, and that's a good thing. We are to walk in the light, as Paul said, because though at one time we were darkness, now we are children of light, and "the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true."
- **Esther the brave**
- At first she wasn't brave. She went from clueless to what was going on to resistant to Mordecai's suggestion that she go see the king. There were practical reasons on her side. She knew that she could lose her head. The Persian king had men around him who carried axes, for that very purpose. He was to be protected at all times, and you couldn't just run into his presence, not without dire consequences. You had to be summoned by the king. His motto was "don't call me; I'll call you." The only hope you had if you went into the inner court to see the king without being summoned was that he would hold out the golden scepter. It is another bit of irony in the story that Vashti, the first queen, lost her position because she would NOT come see the king when summoned. Now Esther risks losing her position and her life by going to see the king **without** being summoned. At this point, Esther the brave is not so brave. She is only thinking about Esther. She makes this case to Mordecai, and that's when the story turns.
- What have we said is the main doctrine that is on display in this story? The doctrine of God's providence. Verse 14 is one of the most eloquent pronouncements of God's providence in all of Scripture. What does Mordecai know, because he knows God? He knows that God will ultimately bring relief and deliverance for His people, and he reminds Esther of that foundational truth. He knows God will keep His covenant promise. That was true of the Jews then, and it is true of the followers of Christ now. Paul wrote to the church near the end of 1Thessalonians that the Lord will descend from heaven with a cry of command...and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then the rest, those who are His and are alive, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, "and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:13-18) Then in the next letter to them he says it again, in a different way, that God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict His people, and "to grant relief to you who are afflicted," and that the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed." (2 Thess. 1:5-10) God delivers His people and in so doing HIS glory is on display. Mordecai knew that.

- What does Mordecai NOT know, even while standing firmly on God's providence? He did NOT know whether Esther would be the instrument God would use to save His people. That's why he says, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" He didn't believe in the prosperity gospel any more than you and I should. He didn't tell Esther, "I know that you will save your people, and you will save your people if you have enough FAITH!" That's a lie that puts people in bondage. Mordecai didn't know what God's plan was. He just knew that God had a plan. Most often we don't know the providence of God until we look back and see how He guided us. Jesus even told Peter that at the end of his life Peter would stretch out his hands and another would dress him and take him where he does not want to go. Jesus was telling Peter how he would die, and even told him ahead of time that Peter wouldn't want to go there, but that was God's providence, God's plan.
- Esther had a choice to make, and let's be clear. There was no promise that the king would let her live. He hadn't even wanted to see her for 30 days. She may have fallen completely out of favor, and her showing up in the inner court without an invitation may have been just the excuse he needed to get rid of her and find another beauty queen. She didn't know. And the stakes were very high. But as Shawn said two weeks ago, "a life of obedience changes us before it changes the culture." When Esther said she would do it and said, "If I perish, I perish," she was acknowledging that she would rather sacrifice her life being obedient than save her life being disobedient. That it is better to die for a cause that will ultimately succeed than to live for a cause that will ultimately fail, to paraphrase Peter Marshall.
- Esther the brave decided, but she did not take matters into her own hands She took a stand and she made a decision. She told Mordecai to gather the Jews in the city and fast, and she would fast, and her young women would fast. Because when she went into the inner court, it would not be on her own merits, and it would not be trusting in herself and her looks and her personality. She would go trusting in the living God, and in His strength alone. And she knew that God would be with her. The last time I saw Martha Orcutt was the day before I left for South Africa. She was tired, and struggling mightily to keep her thoughts together. When I asked her if she wanted to pray for anyone, she kept saying that she was thinking of somebody but couldn't remember who it was. But when I asked her if she had sung to Jesus that morning, she hesitated for a moment, closed her eyes, and then sang in a strong, clear voice: "Be not dismayed what 'ere betide, God will take care of you." And He did.
- Esther knew that she didn't have to live. But she did have to obey God. It could be argued that the moment she came to that place in her life was when she really began to live. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's, Jesus said, will save it."
- As we close, and as we prepare for a baptism, may I remind you that the inner court of the King of kings is open, but you cannot enter on the strength of your own merit. You cannot enter in your sin. You cannot even enter in your own name. The door has been opened by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and he alone can save you. You don't have to be afraid that He will not extend to you the golden scepter. He has given the invitation! Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, weighed down by your own sin and your own double-life and the secrets that nobody knows about...come to Me, and I will give you rest. Only He can. Only He will.
- When Esther decided that the life of obedience was more important than her own life, everything changed.