



The Book of Esther

Simi Hills Sunday School • 2017

Class 3

Esther's Dilemma

Esther 4:1 through 4:17

- Often, what is not said is as important as what is said
- Too often I read Esther and “filled in the blanks” rather than leaving them blank and learning from the silence
- I think that when you take the text as it is, it tells a different story
- **SLIDE**
- Esther 4:1-3
 - 1) When Mordecai **learned all that had been done**, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the **midst of the city**, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.
 - 2) He went up to the **entrance of the king's gate**, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.
 - 3) And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was **great mourning among the Jews**, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

- There are some clues here to the idea that maybe Mordecai was a leader of the Jews
- Firstly, he learned ALL that had been done
- This seems to suggest that he had some kind of access to inside information, and we know that it wasn't Esther
- When he becomes aware of the law which has just been created, he begins to mourn
- His mourning doesn't seem quite normal
- Mordecai goes into the center of the city
- I would expect him to mourn privately rather than publicly
- I think that this is another suggestion to the idea that he was a leader of the Jews, and his public mourning was the cue for the rest of the Jews to join him in mourning
- Thirdly, it seems like he might have stationed himself in front of the King's Gate in order to get the King's attention, as some kind of official protest
- What's interesting is what we are told, and what we are not told
- We are told that there was great mourning among all of the Jews
- That is all we are told
- We are not told that they repented
- We are not told that they prayed
- The name of God is never mentioned
- There is no specific mention of prayer
- There is no reference to God speaking to His people through a Prophet
- The entire Jewish Race has just been sentenced to death, and God is silent on this topic?
- It's almost as if God saw this day coming, and had already warned them about it

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- Isaiah 29:9-10

- 9) Astonish yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink!
- 10) For the **Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep**, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers).

- Esther finds out about Mordecai

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- Esther 4:4

- 4) When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the **queen was deeply distressed**. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

- It's interesting that her first attempt isn't to understand what is going on, and why Mordecai is mourning

- Her first attempt is to persuade him to stop mourning

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- Esther 4:5-8

- 5) Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to **learn what this was and why it was**.
- 6) Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate,

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- 7) and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the **exact sum** of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

8) Mordecai also gave him a **copy of the written decree** issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people.

- This is scary stuff for Esther, because contact like this would threaten her ability to keep her identity as a Jew and her relationship to Mordecai a secret
- Did you notice that Mordecai knows the exact amount of the money that Haman is paying, and even has a copy of the written decree?

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- Esther 4:9-12

9) And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

10) Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say,

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11) “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law - **to be put to death**, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”

12) And they told Mordecai what Esther had said.

- This is new ground here...
- Esther is accustomed to following Mordecai’s instructions
- It’s safe to assume that Mordecai is accustomed to being obeyed, even by the Queen
- Esther’s response can be summed up in two words, “Um. No.”
- These aren’t the words of the Hero that I had always taken her for
- Compare her response here to Daniel’s friends:

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- Daniel 3:16-18

- 16) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.
- 17) If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.
- 18) But if not, **be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”**

- Mordecai doesn't accept No as an answer

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- Esther 4:13-14

- 13) Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “**Do not think** to yourself that in the king's palace **you will escape** any more than all the other Jews.
- 14) For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And **who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”**

- Mordecai's argument is quite clear:

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- 1) Don't think that you will be safe in the **Palace**

- It's wishful thinking to think that a Jew will be safe anywhere, including the King's Palace
- Esther seems to think that she will be safe, but Mordecai sets her straight
- The most dangerous thing she can do is to do nothing and hope it will all just go away

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- 2) **You** are our only hope

- But wait, doesn't Verse 14 say that if she doesn't act to save her people, that God will bring about their deliverance in some other way?

- Maybe not...
- I'm no scholar, but there is sufficient evidence that the verse here is rhetorical
- It could be that Mordecai says, "*Will relief and deliverance arise for the Jews from another place?*"
- I think that fits the context of the story of Esther better...
- Notice once again the contrast between this and the friends of Daniel
- **SLIDE**
- Daniel 3:17-18
 - 17) If this be so, **our God whom we serve is able to deliver us** from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.
 - 18) **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."
- God is not mentioned in Esther
- Mordecai doesn't say to her, "*if you keep silent at this time, God will deliver us another way*"
- Mordecai is not a godly Jew, trusting in God to save his people
- He is very much like a lot of the Jews from the past century, who see their nation's deliverance as a result of their own initiative
- This helps to explain the second half of the verse
- Why does Mordecai threaten Esther?
- If deliverance arises for the Jews from another place, then why would Esther die?
- I think that Mordecai is telling her that she is their only hope
- Because they don't hope in the Lord...

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3) The survival of your **family** is in your hands

- Remember that Esther is an orphan
- Her parents are both dead
- Mordecai is the only family that she has left
- So, what is he really saying here?
- If you don't act, then **BOTH** of us will die!
- Her entire family will be wiped out, and it will all be your fault!
- No pressure...

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- Esther 4:15-17

15) Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,

16) “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and **hold a fast on my behalf**, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. **Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.**”

17) Mordecai then went away and **did everything as Esther had ordered him.**

- The pressure is too great, and Esther gives in
- But, look how things have changed now
- Esther is giving orders and Mordecai is obeying
- Esther's response, If I die, then I die... Is often regarded as a statement of Faith

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- But, let's not confuse being a **Hero** with being **Faithful**

- History has shown us many heroes who do remarkable things to save their nations
- It's probably safe to say that every nation, and even many villages, have historical accounts of men and woman who have done remarkable and great acts of selflessness in order to save their people
- I think that with the prodding she received from Mordecai, Esther does rise to the challenge
- She does accept the responsibility of trying to save the Jews
- It's a great story and wonderful that this young, beautiful girl rises up to do something so dangerous
- But, that doesn't mean that she was a faithful and godly person
- Here are some thoughts

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- 1) Esther decides to risk her life only when **pressured** by Mordecai, and only after he informs her that her life is in danger also

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- 2) Esther's words, "If I perish, I perish" are far from an affirmation of faith, they are, instead a **declaration of fatalism**

- I don't think that Esther is showing any faith or belief in God's ability to deliver her
- I think that she is just saying, "What will be, will be"

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- 3) Again: **NO** mention of God, **NO** mention of faith, **NO** clear reference to prayer, or **NO** repentance is uttered by either Esther or Mordecai

- Can you think of another time in the Bible when the Nation of Israel is threatened, and the response wasn't to tear their garments, fall upon the ground, and REPENT in weeping and ashes
- Clearly, if God is bringing destruction upon us, then we must have done something wrong

- Repent, therefore, or suffer under the just and righteous hand of God

- Nothing like that here...

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- Conclusion?

- I'm sorry if this isn't a positive lesson

- I always try to bring you a positive, uplifting lesson

- It would be much nicer to talk about the old version of Esther

- If Esther and Mordecai are not examples of godliness and faith whom we are to imitate, then what are we to learn from this book?

- I think that we are supposed to learn a negative lesson

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- The Book of Esther should be read as a **WARNING** to us as how **NOT** to act

- There are good people who do good things in the world

- This doesn't mean that they are faithful to our Heavenly Father

- Likewise, the same can apply to us in our lives

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- Don't assume that if the right **FORM** are present, the right **FUNCTION** is also present

- We assume that because the Jews mourned, that they repented

- We assume that because the Jews fasted, that they prayed

- We assume that because Mordecai says that Esther might be the means of the Jews deliverance, that he had faith that God would care for his chosen people

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- The Book of Esther is trying to teach us that we can go through the **right motions** and yet never really **know God**
- This is a pattern for the Jews in the Old Testament

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- Amos 5:21-22

- 21) “I hate, **I despise your feasts**, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
- 22) **Even though you offer me your burnt offerings** and grain offerings, **I will not accept them**; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them.

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- Micah 6:6-8

- 6) “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?
- 7) **Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams**, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- 8) He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the **Lord require of you** but to **do justice**, and to **love kindness**, and to **walk humbly** with your God?

- This concern continued into the New Testament with the Jews at the time of Jesus as well
- Jesus fought against the Scribes and Pharisees who were caught up in external things which could be seen, but on the inside were full of filthiness
- And, lest we think that this applies solely to Jews, Paul warns us as well:

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- 2nd Timothy 3:1-5

- 1) But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

- 2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
- 3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,
- 4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

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- 5) **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.** Avoid such people.

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- Faith must be judged not by its **FORM** but by its **FUNCTION**
- The Jews were faithful to ritualistically carry out all the proper “forms” of their religion
- But the essence of true faith and practice was not there
- Without the right functions, the forms are worthless and dead
- When accompanied by the right functions, the forms are beneficial
- But when we get lost when we assume that having the right forms assures us we also have the right function
- We have become just like the Persian Jews such as Esther and Mordecai
- Looking like a Christian is not the same as acting like a Christian

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- Having the **FORM** of Christ’s Ecclesia is not the same as the **FUNCTION** of the Ecclesia
- There is one corollary to this idea of Form and Function that I would like to share...
- There are believers, who for one reason or another do not have the same forms we do, but who nevertheless manifest the vitality and function which is biblically correct

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- Just because someone doesn’t look like **YOU**, doesn’t mean that they are not like **CHRIST**

- Let us therefore take this text in Esther as a warning to us not to equate form and function

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- Don't think that because we are going through the **Right Motions** we are living in **True Fellowship** with God

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- It is indeed sad when Believers become obsessed with **FORM** and forget the **FUNCTION**

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- But it is even sadder when a person goes through life thinking he or she is a Believer simply because they have **OBSERVED** certain **FORMS**

- A Believer is a person who has passed from **darkness to light**, from **death to life**

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- Being a Believer isn't so much about what **You** have done, but trusting in what **Christ** did

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- If you are a believer, then you won't trust in **FORM**

- You won't be concerned about **RITUALS**

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- You will put your Trust in Christ **ALONE**