



Esther 4:1-17
Esther: The God Behind Everything
“For Such A Time As This”

Rev. Brian North
November 14th, 2021

This morning we continue our series in Esther. Last week we saw Esther get crowned as queen after a national search to replace Queen Vashti who was deposed from the position by King Xerxes. Esther has a true rags-to-riches story, being orphaned when she was younger and raised by her cousin Mordecai, and then also being a part of the Jewish community that is still in exile in Persia...and she ends up as queen of Persia. It's unexpected, which is how God frequently works.

Before we dive into chapter four, I want to summarize from where we left off near the end of chapter 2 and through chapter 3. First, Mordecai – who has a position at the government building there in Susa – he finds out about a plot by a couple of guards, to assassinate King Xerxes. He gets word to Esther, who tells the King. After an investigation, the two guys are found to be guilty of this plot, and they pay for it with their lives.

Then in chapter 3 we are introduced to a new guy: Haman. He's a government official whom Xerxes elevates to be his right-hand man. Xerxes commands everyone else to “honor” him. The “honor” Xerxes commands people to now show Haman is borderline worship. In their culture, Kings were deified, and it appears that Xerxes is essentially conferring the status of deity on Haman, and people are commanded to bow down before him. Well, Mordecai refuses to bow down before him as everyone else does. It goes against his Jewish faith.

This angers Haman. He finds out that Mordecai is Jewish, and hatches a plan to punish not only Mordecai but kill all the Jews who are within the Persian Kingdom. Haman tells King Xerxes about his plan with a promised financial gift into the king's treasury if he will let Haman carry out the plan. Xerxes is very open to the idea, tells Haman to keep his money and even gives his signet ring to Haman for him to give the seal of approval on all the notices making this declaration that will be taken to all the provinces of Persia. So, Xerxes ends up being fairly hands-off in the whole thing, with Haman the

ringleader in an effort to have the Jews eradicated from their kingdom. That gets us to **Esther 4:1-17. Pray.**

Ok, so: **In the first few verses we see the reaction of Mordecai and other Jews to this edict that's been given, and of course, they're grieving.** The clock is ticking down on their lives. Through her attendants, Esther tries to console Mordecai, but he refuses. So, in verse 5, she sends one attendant to go and speak to Mordecai and find out what's going on. Mordecai tells him about this edict that the Jews are going to be eradicated, and asks that a message be taken back to Esther to plead with the king on their behalf to have them saved.

Esther gets word back to Mordecai that she can't just go in and initiate a conversation with the king on her own; even as the queen her life would be at stake unless he has grace on her and extends the golden scepter as a sign of that grace. So, she's in her own vulnerable and risky position with the king. And to top it off, she says at the end of verse 11 that it's been 30 days since she was called to go into the king. So, in other words, it's not like they've had a recent conversation where she can go in on the premise of continuing that conversation. **In fact, given that it's been 30 days since she and the king spoke, their relationship seems not to be on the best of terms right now.** I mean, if I were to ever go 30 days without a conversation with Gwen, I would know there's a problem in the marriage. I know, you're surprised I would be able to figure that out, even after 24 years of marriage. Anyway, that's a free bonus marital tip for you this morning.

So, then Mordecai gets word back to her. First of all, he reminds her that her life is at stake anyway. Just because she's the queen, it doesn't mean she'll be saved while her Jewish comrades are annihilated. And though he doesn't mention Vashti, Queen Esther certainly knows that Vashti's fate is an example that makes Mordecai's point: Being Xerxes' wife and queen doesn't ensure safety. But then he continues on saying that God will work out his plans – deliverance will come – even if it means working through someone else to accomplish them. And if that happens, then God will deal with her on his own terms. And then he closes with this incredible line, **“And who**

knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14b).

So, to Mordecai, it's clear that Esther's rise to this position is no accident. We talked about that last week. It's not just a "coincidence." God may not be mentioned but his will is clearly being played out, even as people exercise their free wills. There's a purpose for her being there. And she has free will to respond as well. But God is going to bring deliverance to them one way or another – either through her or through someone else. And so why not step forward? That's what Mordecai is saying. Her life is at risk either way. And if God really has put her in this place for just this very moment – to speak to the king on behalf of the Jews, her own people, – if God really has put this unique woman in this position for this purpose, then why would she say "no"? Now's the time. She's come to this royal position for exactly this very moment. That's Mordecai's message.

After the message is conveyed to Esther, she agrees to do it, and asks for Mordecai and the other Jews to fast from food and drink on her behalf. And she and her attendants will do the same. It's a way of being bonded together, and giving them a sense of unity even as they're separated by a royal line in the sand. And: **At the end of that time she will go to the king, with her final conclusion being, "If I perish, I perish."**

She realizes that Mordecai is right. Whether she does the right thing or not, her life is in danger. If Mordecai is right that God will deliver the Jews through some other means if she doesn't do it, then she has to face God almighty and whatever consequences might be there. Mordecai says in verse 14 that she and her family will perish. If deliverance of the Jews *doesn't* come from some other person, and Haman's plan is carried out, then she perishes with the Jews. And if she goes in to the King to speak to him, she again may perish unless he shows some measure of grace to her. But that is really the one path she has for a possible positive outcome for her personally, and for her spiritual family. And it's an incredible response she has once she comes to her decision: "If I perish, I perish." She's putting her life in God's hands.

So, I want to take Mordecai's line to her about her being in this place "for such a time as this" and her response, and look at it through the lens of our church this morning. Not your neighborhood or your place of work or your family or network of friends as I often emphasize – and we need that emphasis because it's too easy to just stick to our Christian "bubble." Today, let's talk about our church family of faith, just as Esther and Mordecai are talking about their family of faith and their future together. So let me dive in, with this question: **What if God has put you here, in this place, at this church – this family of faith – "for such a time as this"?** What if God has put you here to help RH become the flourishing, vibrant church God is calling us to be? What if your growth in discipleship to Jesus is connected to helping Rose Hill flourish as a church? As Mordecai said to Esther: could God raise up other people to help us live into that future? Absolutely! God could do the same thing in their day as Mordecai himself says.

But, he's put *you* here. He's put *me* here. God's fingerprints are all over our being in this family of faith together. Some of us are here by no less miraculous process than how Esther ended up as queen. Some of you had no intention of living in Kirkland or anywhere around here, but a job came open, or a relationship began, or something else happened that brought you here. Some of you never thought you'd be part of a Presbyterian Church – you were Baptist, or Assemblies of God, or Muslim, or agnostic or atheistic...or even: F) All of the above. Some of you never thought you'd be part of a church with a worship band – and you thought we were crazy for ushering that in to the culture of Rose Hill nearly 8 years ago; Others of you never thought you'd be at a church with an organ and pews, because that isn't hip enough for you; None of you thought you'd be at a church with a short, shaved head, UW grad for a pastor. And then some of you have been a part of this family of for decades and decades: Maybe the miracle for you is that you're still here!

So, I would suggest to you that: **We're all a part of this family of faith, and God has brought you here "for such a time as this."** We are at a crucial point in the life of our church. Arguably, (and I don't mean this to be overly dramatic) as crucial as at any other moment or season of life at RH. For the last several years, we've been on a turnaround process to rejuvenate some

things, reinvigorate ministries, and become more of a generationally balanced church. Unfortunately, making that kind of change in a church is kind of like turning around a big ocean-going ship: It doesn't turn on a dime. And so we're in that process, and we've made some great strides, but we have some potentially significant steps to take in early 2022 when we step into this Church Transformation Process that I mentioned a couple months ago.

So here we are, we're all a part of this, God has brought you here somehow to Rose Hill Church and you're incorporated into the family of faith here whether you've become a Covenant Partner or not. And this is the "moment" in time we have. It's not a life or death matter for us like it was for Esther and her Jewish family of faith: but are we stepping out in faith in giving of ourselves? Back in September we had several messages in regards to how we use our time and our talent. We continue to have a number of ways you can serve God through the ministries of Rose Hill, and they're all on a list at our website. But one additional element of following Jesus that is always particularly difficult for people is in regards to our money. **Esther puts her life on the line. Are we willing to put our finances on the line?** And not *all* that we have (like it was for her)...just a percentage. 10% is what Scripture commands, though the average giving to churches in America is closer to 2.5%.

God has blessed you and orchestrated things to put you here at this time, and to give you the financial means that you have. Like the book of Esther, God might have been kind of hidden in how you got your job that gives you your paycheck, or the stock portfolio that has increased, or house you sold that gave you a tidy profit. In a lot of those situations we might not even think about God's role: after all, in the case of your work, you're the one who got out of bed each morning, went to work, worked hard, did a good job, etc. But like we see in Esther, God orchestrates things and equips us to do things for the benefit of His Kingdom and His purposes, *even as we make our own freewill choices*. In fact, God can use the choices we've made about things – including finances – in ways we might not ever anticipate.

For instance, there's the story about a Catholic Priest, named Father O'Malley. The phone at the church office rang and he answered the phone.

'Hello, is this Father O'Malley?'

'It is!'

'This is the IRS. Can you help us?'

'I can!'

'Do you know a Ted Houlihan?'

'I do!'

'Is he a member of your congregation?'

'He is!'

'Did he donate \$10,000 to your church?'

'He will.'

See? Didn't see that coming, right? God uses our own free choices – even lies to the government – to carry out his mission and plan. But that's not really where we want to be, right? **We want to be used *positively* for God's purposes.** We don't want to be used by God *in spite* of our choices; we want to be used *because* of them...because they're lined up with God's mission. We see the same negative use of people in Jesus' so-called trial and his crucifixion. People made their own free-will judgment about him and the things he said, and it led to him being put up on the cross. Certain people of the day thought they'd won. Satan thought he had just won; that he had out-smarted God. But guess what? It all fit in with God's plan. It was exactly what God designed to happen. The tragedy of it all was that it even needed to happen in the first place. The fact of our sin is the tragedy, but praise God He's taken the initiative to overcome it.

So, now *we* can be used *positively* to bring about God's mission. Esther is a great model for us. And like her, we are here for such a time as this. God has brought us together for this season in the life of Rose Hill Church. And there's a future he's calling us into that will help Rose Hill to flourish more for Him and His Kingdom than we are right now. And it takes us responding like Esther did, and like Jesus did, where we are willing to give of ourselves in spite of the cost. This is true of our time and our talent – but it's also true about our finances. **Are we willing to step out in faith and bear that cost, and trust that God will take care of us?** Esther shows incredible faith, and next week we'll see where that leads – does it cost her life, or not? For those who don't know, I'll give you a hint: unlike Jesus, there's no death involved.

She's willing to die, but it doesn't come to that, and God is with her every step of the way.

God does the same for us. I pray that as we consider our part in the life of Rose Hill, as we think about our church's role in God's Kingdom and how we express that and live into it in the world around us...I pray we'd seize the opportunity that God is giving us, including in the commitment of our finances. He's brought us to this point in time, and this season of life for our church. I'm glad to be a part of it...in fact, I became pastor here just over 9 years ago for this very purpose. And I hope you are glad to be a part of this moment in time here as well, because God has brought us all here together as a church family for such a time as this. Let's pray...Amen.