

Sermon: Esther

Series: Heroes of the Bible

Speaker: Kevin White

Date: July 31, 2022

Picture this, around 500 years before Jesus was born and 100 years after the Jewish people were taken over by the Babylonians, there's a girl named Esther. She's Jewish, and like most other people her age, she's living life. She's skipping along, full of joy and happiness.

Like a Disney story, tragedy strikes. The Bible doesn't tell us how, but both of her parents pass away.

All of a sudden, her life takes a turn and is now totally different than she anticipated.

How many people can relate?

Pandemic anyone?

Although in SOME ways, the worst of the pandemic seems to be behind us, the trauma and the depleted reserves that it has left us with will be with us all for a long time to come.

Where is God? Why does this happen?

Her uncle Mordecai adopts her and raises her. She's living a quiet, humble life, under the radar...

On the other side you have this king - King Xerxes. King of Persia. They are the big powerful nation of the time.

This king is a bit of a weird guy. He does random things that affect a lot of people. Some positive and some very negative. Here's a couple of examples.

He throws a couple of parties that last over a hundred days. So far, not so bad. He gives away lots of free stuff and all the people of the nation around him are having a good time.

But then, when he's drunk, he asks for his wife - the queen to come. You see, she was beautiful and he wanted to show her off in front of everyone. So not very respectful of women.

But then, she refuses to come.

And then, he gets mad. Like really mad. He asks his advisors what he should do. They say, you gotta put these women in their place - not very respectful of women. So they

suggest that he just fires her from being queen, have a beauty pageant and then get a new queen. Super random and not at all how you should be treating women. But I did tell you, he's a really random guy. For a guy with so much control, he can't really control himself - you'll see more of that later.

That's where we get back to Esther.

Esther is entered into the beauty pageant.

Long story short, she wins the pageant, marries the King and becomes the new queen.

Later Vashti (old Queen) - hello Esther (new Queen)

So, a couple of things. Is this what Esther wanted when she planned out her life? Probably not. But here she is.

Second thing - Where is God? Why does this happen?

Then there's Haman.

Haman is 2nd in command to the king and not a very nice guy. He's very proud.

And lastly there's Mordecai. Esther's uncle. So he checks in on her and makes sure she's okay.

So you have Esther, who's our Bible hero of the day, Mordecai, her uncle, then you have the King and Haman.

Back to Haman. He's an evil guy and likes himself a lot. Like A LOT.

So he gets the king to order that everyone has to bow to him (not bow to the king - bow to himself - Haman). Haman gets the king to order that people bow to him - again. The king is pretty random letting his second in command get royal treatment like that but whatevs...

So everyone's bowing to Haman... except Mordecai. Mordecai doesn't bow to him. Maybe because he's Jewish and only wants to worship God. Maybe.

So Haman gets mad. Like super mad. He gets so mad that he wants to destroy Mordecai. But not only Mordecai, when he finds out Mordecai is Jewish, he wants to destroy all of the Jewish people too.

He offers to pay the king to let him destroy all the Jews.

The king says, "Okay." I told you, he was random.

They set a date about a year from then, when people can just randomly destroy the Jews.

Where is God? Why does he let this happen?

Oh, yeah, I should mention that one time some dudes wanted to kill the king. Mordecai finds out about it, and tells some people who tell the king. The king investigates it, it turns out to be true and so Mordecai saves the king's life.

Put that in your pocket for later.

So obviously, the Jews are feeling anxious and panicking and depressed because they are going to be destroyed.

But wait, didn't God promise to protect the Jews? Didn't he promise Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and all the others that he was going to bless them?

Where is God now? Why's he letting this happen?

So then Mordecai and Esther start texting each other. I actually have a copy of their texts.

Mordecai: Yo Esther, go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for your peeps.

Esther: All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned by the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives (told you, this guy is random). But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.

Mordecai: Yo fam, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. **And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?**"

Esther: Yo uncle, how you coming at me like that?

...

Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

So Esther has a few problems here.

- a. The king doesn't know she's Jewish
- b. There's a plan out to kill all the Jewish people
- c. The king is super random and has anger issues
- d. If she goes to him and he doesn't accept her, that could be the end of her (and the Jewish people) - remember the first Queen?

You start to see some of her character here. She asks everyone to pray for her and she is willing to act. So that's an important thing.

We need support. You can't go through trauma alone.

We need to pray, and we need to ask others to pray

But, we also need to act. You shouldn't act without pray and you shouldn't pray without action.

Esther asks the king (and Haman to a banquet).

They have the banquet. The king asks Esther what she wants and she invites the King and Haman to another banquet the next day.

Haman was proud before - but now he's even more proud. He brags about how he got invited to a special banquet which no one else got invited to.

But he's still salty because Mordecai isn't bowing to him. So he builds the really bad device - 70 feet tall. And he plans to destroy Mordecai on it.

Hey kids. I'm going to talk about a word called irony. So I brought an iron. You see what I did there?

Irony is when the opposite happens.

This story is full of irony.

Here's one. Of all the nights the king couldn't sleep... all of a sudden, the night after the first banquet. He can't sleep. So he gets his official record book and asks for someone to read it to him to put him to sleep. The King basically asks for a bedtime story

LAUGH OUT LOUD :)

He hears the story about Mordecai saving his life and he's like oh yeah, that dude. Did I ever do anything for him?

Another word is coincidence - it's when it feels like events or situations match up or happened on purpose.

So “coincidentally” Haman is about to go to the king to ask if he can destroy Mordecai.

Before he can say what he wants him to say, the king asks Haman for advice on what to do for a man he wants to honour.

Haman thinks it’s him that the king wants to honour, so he goes all out - basically asking to be treated like royalty. Even though he was already being treated like royalty.

He says, put the person on the king’s special horse, make them wear the king’s special robe and have a person lead that special someone shouting - this is what is done for the man the king delights to honour.

The king’s like - good. Go do that... for Mordecai.

Irony - remember how Haman wanted Mordecai to bow to him? Now Haman has to parade Mordecai around town saying this is what is done for the man the king delights to honour.

Even Haman’s wife and his friends are like, yo’ it’s probably not a good idea for you to try to mess with the Jewish people.

I wonder if God was trying to talk to Haman. Haman had a chance here to stop what he was doing and go in a different direction.

God is always speaking. But are we listening? God is a good God. And he wants everyone to be in a relationship with him. No matter what your story is, how bad it seems, or what you’ve done.

How would Haman’s story have been different if he changed his ways right at this point?

But he decided to keep going his own way.

The second banquet.

The next day, Esther has another banquet for the King and Haman.

Esther finally tells the king what’s up. That someone has paid for her people to be destroyed.

The king’s all mad - for me personally, I can’t believe he has no clue. But again - He’s so random.

He’s like yo’ who? Who would do such a thing?

Then Esther’s like Haman!

Haman has a panic attack. He sees that everything is going the opposite way he planned.

The King leaves in a rage.

Haman is kneeling at Esther's feet begging for mercy.

Irony. He wanted a Jewish person to bow to him now he's bowing to a Jewish person.

Coincidence - the king happens to be walking back in and he sees Haman over Esther.

The King flips out - he thinks Haman is trying to destroy Esther or whatever and that's that. He gives his servants the signal and they take Haman away to destroy him.

Then the king allows Esther and the Jewish people to defend themselves against people who are trying to destroy them. And the irony ends up being that Haman and his family who were trying to get rid of the Jews end up getting destroyed themselves. And people become so afraid of the Jews that they become Jews themselves or help the Jews so that the Jewish people end up surviving.

Irony - Mordecai gets promoted to second in command - which was Haman's position.

Biggest irony? This book (Esther) was almost left out of the Bible because the name of God isn't mentioned in it.

Where was God? He was there the whole time.

He was working in real life situations. Situations that were messy and random and traumatic and didn't seem to make sense.

He worked through the King even though the king wasn't following God. He worked through Haman even though Haman was doing the exact opposite of God. He worked through Esther and Mordecai even though they weren't perfect (they weren't kosher, etc). They aren't perfect. They are real. Just like you and me. And that's why Esther is such a Biblical hero. She's a regular person just like us.

So what can we learn from this?

We can trust God even when we can't see him working (Bible Project)

We have hope that no matter how bad things get, God is committed to making this world better.

God isn't hiding, He's sometimes hidden (Warren Wiersbe)

Application - trust him without fear - follow him without hesitation.

I want you to take some time right now - online or in person, and think about what's something that you need to trust God with right now.

Pause

Is there something going on in your life right now that has you saying, God - where are you? (please put this as the hand thingy in the chat)

If you're online, click that hand button. If you're in person, raise your hand and put it down.

This story is a reminder that God is not random - even though life may seem like it.

God isn't hiding, He's sometimes hidden.

What's that thing you need to trust God with? What's one thing you can do to follow him?

Do you need to get people to pray and fast for you? Do you need to make a choice to stop doing something that's not right or start doing something that is right?

Remember, Esther was standing up for people that couldn't stand up for themselves. Is God calling you to help a group of people who need extra help? Think of our mission's to Roatan, Thunder Bay or Nicaragua. Connect with Bethany about helping locally...

Look at how many things were out of Esther's control - losing her parents, marrying the King, Haman trying to destroy the Jews, the King having random rules (can't just come into my presence)

We can get anxious over decisions that happen around us that we can't control, we can be mad at God or we can look at the fact that every day we have a choice. We can choose to trust God in the middle of stuff that seems out of control (Warren Weirsbe)

Look at how obscure Esther was. And yet God used her. What about you? You might not feel like anything special but what if God allowed you to be in the situation you're in for such a time as this?

What was the name of the boy who gave Jesus the loaves and the fish? Nobody knows, but he was part of history.

Mordecai and Esther were random and then all of a sudden they are playing a key part in this chapter of God's story (Warren Weirsbe)

What about you?

Do you trust God?.

We're all on a journey to find out what adventure God has for us as we follow him.

We can be part of history as we are part of HIS story.

Why does God allow bad people to do bad things in this world - like the king, Haman or bullies at school, bosses at work, etc. It's so complicated but it's not like God leaves us alone. God is with us.

God is not hiding. He's sometimes hidden.

God has different timing from us - Vashti was Queen for 3 years, then 4 years later, Esther became queen, then 5 years later Haman had his plot against the Jews... we read this story quickly, but it's over 10 years long! Are you in the middle of a story right now?

God is not hiding, he's sometimes hidden.

But nothing in this world is outside the influence of God (Warren Weirsbe).

But nothing in this world is outside the influence of God

I should say that although this story has a happy ending for Esther and Mordecai, in a fallen world like ours - where God's way is not always the way people choose, not every story has a happy ending - on this side of history.

Actually, on this side of history, many people go through hard times BECAUSE they are following Jesus. God hasn't promised that we're all going to be promoted and be rich like Esther and Mordecai, but he does promise to be with us and that he will write the last chapter of the story (Warren Weirsbe).

So what about you?

How can you be a hero like Esther? How can you be faithful in your story?

Whatever you're going through, it's not the last chapter of the story.

God is with you. And for you. And you can make it through.

Who knows, perhaps God has called you for such a time as this.