

Esther – Part 3

The Call to Action – 7/12/2020

This is the third and final part of our series on Esther. We'll focus on what it means not only to take personal responsibility for our actions, but in fact — to **ACT**. The theme that I set for this series, and I think it's the theme of the book of Esther, is that *God is completely sovereign*, and *we are* — at the same time, without any inconsistency — *completely responsible*.

In every generation, God positions His people for the inevitable battle between good and evil, light and darkness. If all we do is take a stand for what's right and true, our enemy Satan will marshal his forces against us. We don't have to go pick a fight. Satan will bring the fight to us, simply because of who we are. Our identity is found in Christ alone — not in *class*, not in *race*, not in *nationality*, not in *gender*, not in **any** group that we belong to, not in the **traits** we share with others. We are born the children of Adam, born in sin. And when we come to Christ, we are born again as the children of God, and set free from sin and death. We are then one with Christ, one with God, and one with each other. Christ is the tie that binds us together, *eternally*.

In any battle, there are three things to know: (1) what the risks are; (2) who our enemy is; and (3) what we're fighting for. As we learned last time, we're not fighting merely for survival. We're fighting for the right to testify of the **truth** of God, of the **grace** of God, and of the **love** of God, embodied in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Our culture opposes God, and it opposes Christ. That's because, apart from Christ, it is our nature to be at war with God. And so, as a practical matter, ***the world*** — *whatever* culture we live in — is at war with the people of God.

Our very existence as followers of Christ — our belief in God, in his goodness, justice, and holiness; our faith in Christ as our Redeemer and Intercessor — threatens the beliefs and practices of all those who reject God-in-Christ. *That's why Storm Clouds Gather in every generation*. That's why as children of light, walking as children of light, we find ourselves opposed by children of darkness (Eph 5.8). We understand that — for once, *we too* were darkness. But now we're sons of light, and sons of the day. We're not of the night or of darkness (1Th 5.5). Nor should we imitate or participate in the darkness.

At the same time, there are others who are now in the darkness, who were chosen in Christ before the foundations of the earth, who are being called into the Light by God, through the Gospel. ***That's*** why we fight; and *that's* why Christ died — ***to set the captives free***. To that end, God calls His people to *action*, not *inaction* — to *courage*, not *fear* or *indifference*.

Esther was forced to hide her identity as a Jew. She was taught to fit in with the Persians while she was in exile, to go along with the *goyim*, the outsiders, but never to become one of them. She was a *foreigner*, a stranger in a strange land. She must not make that world her own, even though she lives there.

We Christians are in the same dilemma. *We don't live here*; but we need to make a living here. We're not called to *fit in*, but to be counter-cultural. And yet we must be *all* things to *all* men, **if** we are *by all means*, to save *some* (1Cor 9.22). Staying true to our identity in Christ, is a daily battle. To fight at the very gates of hell, without compromise — and yet **with** compassion — is a daily battle. We must be *non-partisan* as we love our enemies; but then *partisans* when it comes to the Gospel. We remain faithful to Christ, and advocates of righteousness at all times — but as we stand for what is right, and good, and true, *we will have trouble in this world*, for Christ's sake.

Mordecai discovered this. He did what was right in the sight of God, by not bending the knee to Haman, who thought himself a *demigod*. Haman hated Mordecai for it. And yet God honors those who honor Him (1Sam 2.30) — And so Mordecai was honored by the King in the sight of the people. And then he returned to his work, watching at the King's gate.

Esther was an object of beauty in the sight of men — something she had no control over — nothing she could take pride in. But what made her attractive to others was her *inner* beauty, reflecting her devotion to the things of God. She was admired by all, from the servants to the King — who *loved* her, because her godly love was evident to all.

SLIDE

“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” (Pro 31.30) But let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1Pet 3.4) SLIDE

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (1Cor 13.4-6) BLANK

The first three chapters of Esther describe the Gathering Storm Clouds, as God positions His people for what lies ahead. This father and his adopted daughter knew nothing about what awaited them and the people of God; only that they must *do good to all people, as they have opportunity* (Gal 6.10). And so, when that storm finally breaks, as it does in every generation, as it did for the Jews in Persia, “*if the people of God who are called by His name, will humble themselves, if they will fast and pray, and seek His face* (2Chr 7.14), then *God is Mighty to Save* (Isa 63.1). That was chapters four through six.

So that's where we're at in our story today. We're looking at Esther, chapters seven through ten. God has put everything in place, set everything in motion, and now we're going to see how His plan of salvation unfolds in history.

Let's quickly review chapters 1-6:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti doesn't obey the king's notice to attend his party filled with dignitaries, and so he divorces her.

Chapter 2 – A beauty contest is held to select Vashti's replacement. A young Jewess named *Esther is selected*. Her cousin *Mordecai* raised her as his own daughter. He warns her not to reveal her Jewish identity, then follows her to the palace. The king falls in love with Esther. When Mordecai overhears an assassination plot against the king, he warns Esther, and the King is saved.

Chapter 3 – A wealthy man named Haman is appointed second-in-charge in the empire. He requires everyone to bow down to him. But Mordecai refuses, which infuriates Haman. He learns Mordecai is a Jew, and plots to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire. A decree is issued.

Chapter 4 – All the Jews begin to mourn when they learn of the decree. Mordecai petitions Esther to intercede with the king on behalf of the Jews, but she's afraid. Yet she resolves to save her people, even if she dies

Chapter 5 – Esther is summoned into the king's presence. He offers her anything she wants, “[up to half the kingdom](#).” But before revealing that, she asks him to attend a banquet she's preparing for him *and Haman*. Neither of them knows her identity, or her relationship to Mordecai. Haman wants Mordecai to be hanged on that day, and has built a gallows for the occasion.

Chapter 6 – The king has a restless night, and discovers that Mordecai was never honored for saving him from assassination. He has Haman honor Mordecai, on the day Haman hoped to have Mordecai hanged. Haman is then summoned to Esther's banquet, having no clue what awaits him there.

Let's see how Esther will take her stand, to save her people.

Chapter 7.

The King and Haman have gone to dine with queen Esther. She mentioned nothing about what she wanted from the King. She would let *him* be the one to ask her how he might return the favor, rather than making demands of him. The queen that Esther replaced, thought she had rights and privileges of her own, not seeing that whatever she enjoyed, was by the King's grace alone. That's familiar to us as Christians. So that queen was removed. Esther won't be that presumptuous. She elicits the King's favor by her *submission*.

Sure enough, the king makes his offer, exactly as he did previously. Verse 2. “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!”

And *still*, Esther will not beg and plead, as if she *deserved* his favor. She is coming before God’s anointed, as she might come before God Himself. She will present the facts, and let the King be the one who is offended and outraged at Haman’s audacity — **rather** than expressing any offense on her own part — **rather** than defending herself, or demanding her rights as his queen. She simply asks for her life, and for the lives of her people. Verse 3.

“If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.”

Remember, the King is clueless as to who Esther is. He didn’t know she’s a Jew. He didn’t know she’s Mordecai’s daughter. *All he knows is that he loves her* – that she is more precious to him than all the others – certainly more than Haman, with his aspirations, intrigues, power-grabs, and bribes. I imagine that she gives a pregnant pause here... letting it sink in, waiting for that look of surprise and disbelief – and then... like a diplomat at the U.N., she reveals to him what **he** is about to lose – what has been done to **him**. And how *reasonable* her request is, **if** he agrees... **This is a wise woman.**

I can see her at this point with head bowed, eyes lowered, a quiet voice of *lament* – not haughty – not proud or arrogant.

Verse 4 “For we have been sold, **my people and I**, to be **destroyed**, to be **killed**, and to be **annihilated**.”

Now Esther’s diplomacy is exercised in all its glory — how if it had been anything less than complete destruction, she wouldn’t have bothered the king with such a request. She leaves the decision in his hands, what to **do** about this *dilemma* that she finds herself in — this **loss...** TO THE KING.

“Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the **enemy** could never compensate **for the king’s loss**.”

Mic-drop. **Kathunk!** A simple statement of fact. Then she waits, *silently, patiently*, to let the King *process* what he has just heard. She’ll let *him* speak before she says anything else. Such wisdom is godly, and humble.

Her statement is just 25 five words; but two stand out: **enemy**, and **loss**. The **King’s enemy**, and the **King’s loss**. She knows her husband well. She knows what his pride and ego will drive him to, what his love and concern for her will lead him to. The king is indeed **offended, outraged**,

“*Who is he,*” meaning his enemy, “and *where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?*”

And there sits Haman, his cup of wine halfway to his lips, unable to wrap his mind around *what* just happened, not fully realizing that the trap door has sprung, and the predator has become the prey.

Esther, slowly turns her head towards Haman, trying not to let a smile of satisfaction appear on her lips – head still lowered, a delicate finger pointing in his direction, as she says to the King,

“The adversary and enemy is – this – *wicked* – Haman!”

Again, she simply speaks the truth. Haman is her adversary, and he is Mordecai’s enemy – as Haman has readily confessed to family and friends. And she has let the King know that *if he loves her – as he does* – if he wants to keep her – *and he does* – then this man is **his** adversary and enemy too.

The King needs time to gather his thoughts, and Esther doesn’t press him for a decision. Haman is second in command of the Persian Empire, a man of great wealth, power, and influence. The ramifications are immense, not only for the King, but for the kingdom. He staggers into the garden, weighing one thing against another – Haman, Esther – power, love – greed, compassion. He leaves Haman with Esther, a victim of his own intrigue – hoisted by his own petard.

Haman is pleading for his life, NOT with the King, but with Esther. She holds his life in her hands; if only she will intercede for him. In his desperation he falls onto her couch, as the King re-enters the room. Whatever the King may have decided in the garden, this offense is a bridge too far. Esther doesn’t need to say a word. She *put* this into **God’s** hands days ago, in her fasting. And she will *leave* it in His hands in this moment of crisis. She knew the risk; she knew who her enemy was; and she knew what she was fighting for.

Verse 8. “The king said, “Will he also assault the queen **while I am in the house?!**” As the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.

⁹ Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, “O Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king’s behalf, is standing at the house of Haman.” Then the king said, “Hang him on it!” ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. **Then the king’s wrath subsided. Justice** is served.

His enemy is dead. The King gives Esther the house of Haman for her own. Mordecai comes before the King and reveals that he is Esther’s father. So the

King takes off his signet ring – the sign of his authority – and gives it to Mordecai. Esther, as queen, appoints Mordecai over the house of Haman.

But the dilemma is far from over. Mordecai has acted. Esther has acted. The King has acted. But the people of God are still under a death penalty. And that includes Mordecai, who saved the King's life, and Esther who shares the King's chamber. But the King *cannot* act. He *cannot* undo his own decree. What is written, is written. — But there's still a way out.

Chapter 8, verse 8. Having the King's authority, Mordecai and Esther must act in a way that will permit the people of God to act. God has ordained the outcome. And God is mighty to save. But God ordains that His people will be the means of bringing about His purposes – the means of glorifying His name among the peoples. There are 127 provinces in the Persian Empire. They are the nations of the world. And the nations of the world are about to see the people of God, act *in the name of God,* to uphold **His** justice. The King says to Mordecai and Esther,

⁸ “You yourselves write *a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke.*”

All authority has been given to them, to act in the King's name. The decree is recorded in letters, written in the language of each nation, and sent to the nations, by couriers – by evangelists spreading the good news to prepare for the Day of Judgment, on a date that has already been fixed by God's decree.

There are many similarities with the Gospel, and with our duty as Christians. We've been given authority to act in the King's name, to call the elect of every nation to salvation through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The word of God has been translated into every major language on earth.

But the content of this decree in Esther, is quite *different* from the Gospel. Listen to what the letters said to the nations – and to the Jews:

Chapter 8, v. 11 By these letters the king permitted the Jews who *were* in every city to **gather together and protect their lives** — to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions.

It's not just the authority to defend themselves, but — though the wording is a bit ambiguous — it appears to be permission to exact eye for eye, and tooth for tooth – to return evil for evil. Based on what happened, that certainly seems to be what was understood. **Even so,** here's how the Jews reacted when they heard the news:

¹⁷ In every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

They had a **converts**, "because fear of the Jews fell upon them" – not fear of **God**, but fear of the **Jews**. Yet, these are the people of God, and the nations know it. In the same way that the enemy of Esther, the King's treasured possession, became the enemy of the **King**, the enemy of the *people* of God, who are GOD'S treasured possession, make themselves the enemies of *God*. And as we learned in Habakkuk, God will exact His vengeance on those who harm His people. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord.

Esther, who is a type of the church, did not defend herself against her enemy. She let the King defend her. That's what we Christians do. The book of Esther is *not a parable*; it's *not a fable*; it's *not allegory*. It's historical narrative. And as such, it is **descriptive**, not **prescriptive**. It tells us what *happened*, not what we are *to do*. Nonetheless, it has principles that we are to apply. But before we do, let's finish out this history.

Chapter 9. The appointed day has finally arrived, when Haman's decree is to take effect, and the Jews are to be attacked. But instead of the Jews being overpowered, they overpowered their enemies. They gathered together to fight their enemies who would kill them and their children. But many came to their aid, those in positions of authority in the provinces, because they feared Mordecai, who was over the house of Haman; and this was *Haman's* order, and yet Mordecai was a *Jew*. It was a house divided against itself...

Still, many rose up against the Jews, who hated the Jews. And the judgment of God fell upon them through the people of God – by God's grace and power. In Shushan, the citadel, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. They captured the ten sons of Haman. But they didn't touch the plunder. They didn't seek to gain by blood, what had itself been gained by blood.

Again the King asked Esther what her petition would be, now that her people had been allowed to stand their ground, and to defeat their enemies by their own hand. She asked for an additional day to do the same in Shushan, and that the sons of Haman be hanged. Three hundred more were slain there. And in the provinces, seventy-five thousand of their enemies were slain – but they didn't lay a hand on the plunder. They **defended** what they had, but wouldn't **plunder** what belonged to another. That's called principled living.

Abraham refused to take any of the ill-gotten gains of the five kings he defeated – they were blemished goods, unholy. David wouldn't offer to God, what cost him nothing. The Jews taught the Persians this principled living.

They established the fifteenth day of the month of Adar, as the feast of Purim, because that date had been chosen by Haman and his advisors by lot, and God controls the lots. **So** it was decreed; **so** it was recorded; **so** it's celebrated today, 2500 years later, with gifts, and gladness, and feasting – a holiday in memory of defeating their enemies.

Now for **Chapter 10**, as the story draws to a close. Just three verses. It's a testimonial to Mordecai. He had no wealth or prominence, but because of his integrity and godly character, he *became* a man of wealth and prominence.

¹ King Ahasuerus (*Xerxes*) imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. ² Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, *are they not written in The Book Of The Chronicles Of The Kings Of Media And Persia*?

³ For Mordecai the Jew *was second to King Ahasuerus* – as Joseph was to Pharaoh in Egypt – and he was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to **all** his seed – not only to the Jews, but to all who had his spirit. The people of God are salt and light in the world, a blessing to all we meet.

APPLICATION

For three weeks we've explored events that happened 2500 years ago. We saw the storm gathering, the positioning of God's people, the outbreak of hatred against the people of God, the risk to be taken, the power of the enemy, and the reason to fight. But the **Jews** fought with worldly weapons; **we** fight with spiritual weapons (2Co 10.4) – *the word of truth, the power of God, and the armor of righteousness* (2Cor 6.7). **They** fought against flesh and blood; **we** fight against principalities and powers (Eph 6.12). But our fight is no less real, and no less consequential. The **risk** is the same; the **enemy** is the same; and ***we know what we're fighting for***. In our day, we're fighting to preserve the Church as a public institution.

When do we act? The wind won't rustle in the trees to let us know (2Sa 5.24). Instead, Christ told us to **"GO and MAKE disciples of every nation."** Paul said pastors are to **"equip the saints for *works* of ministry"** (Eph 4.12). **"Take up your cross daily."** These *commandments* tell us that **every believer is called to the work of Jesus Christ**. They tell us the time to act is **now** – and they tell us to do the work of Christ ***daily***.

We must act with *courage* – knowing that God ordains the **outcome** of every battle, every situation, every challenge. And God ordains the **means** by which that outcome is attained. **WE are His means**. His Spirit works in us mightily, to do just that.

We're cleansed to be "vessels for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work." (2Tim 2.21) The **call to follow Christ**, is itself a **call to action**.

SLIDE

The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you." (Jos 10:8 ^{NKJ})

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Know the signs of the times. There's violence in our streets, corruption in our government, incompetence in our courts, propaganda in our universities and schools. But these are only **symptoms** of something much deeper:

For the past century, Satan has been positioning his servants to do evil. The good news is that GOD has been positioning *his* people for such a time as this – that includes **us**, in *this* church. Let me give you a quote from the **1840s**, from James Buchanan, a Scottish theologian. *I want you to know the tree that produced the fruit we're seeing in our day.* He writes,

There is a class of men calling themselves *socialists*. They maintain that the three cardinal evils of society in modern times, are — (1) the *belief in a God*, (2) the *institution of marriage*, and (3) *the right of private property*. They propose to abolish and sweep them all away, in order to introduce a new social order — a *new moral* world — in which religion will be exchanged for Atheism, and marriage for indiscriminate license, and all personal rights for a community of goods.

(He says,) These *horrible* principles — fast spreading, we fear, among the neglected and uneducated poor, and undermining the foundations of our oldest and most revered institutions — are so flagrantly opposed to the truths of the Bible, that so long as the Bible is believed, they must be repudiated and condemned.

Buchanan wrote that in **1843**. When the socialists failed to succeed by force of arms, they chose to change the culture from within. They wanted socialism to be *sought* by the people, rather than *imposed* by the government. They went after what they called "the robes" — the institutions of power and influence in *every* society, **worldwide**. Here's the progression in America:

Socialists began in the 1930s to infiltrate the courts; in the 1940s, the universities and teachers colleges; in the 1950s mass media; in the 1960s race relations and school curricula; in the 1970s women's rights and abortion; in the 1980s the seminaries; in the 1990s the Internet; in the 2000s, major political parties; and during the past decade, they've used Gay Rights as a Trojan Horse, to undermine marriage and attack religious liberties.

So, what **action** are *Christians* called to, in such a time as *this*? God says:

SLIDE

"Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Look carefully then how you **walk, not as unwise but as wise**, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand what the will of the Lord is**. (Eph 5:13-17 ^{ESV})

SLIDE

¹⁵ For **this is the will of God**, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ **Live as people who are free**, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ **Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king**. (1Pe 2:15-17)

You see, this battle isn't about finding social, political, or economic solutions. It's not about getting the right people in positions of authority. We must not put our faith in *men*. *The disease is sin. The cure is the Gospel*. This battle is about changing hearts, and sanctifying lives, beginning with our own.

So we must **guard** our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phi 4.7). When the norms of society are being swept away, *as they are*, we need a strong anchor in the storm. That strong anchor is our hope in Jesus Christ (Heb 6.17-20).

SLIDE – Storm Clouds

The Storm Clouds we're seeing have been gathering for a *century*. This year, the storm broke, and we're finding wolves among the sheep. Lions are prowling about, in search of prey. Like *Mordecai*, be wary. Like *Esther*, be wise — but most of all, as God's children, be courageous and confident, for:

God is mighty to save.

LET'S PRAY. - BLANK

Blessed *be* the LORD my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, *And* my fingers for battle — ² My lovingkindness and my fortress, My high tower and my deliverer, My shield and *the One* in whom I take refuge, who subdues the nations under Christ. ³ LORD, what is man, that You regard him? *Or* the son of man, that You are mindful of him? (Psa 144:1-3 ^{NKJ})

You comfort us, your faithful children. You tell us with lovingkindness,

Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, **Yes**, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' (Isa 41:10 ^{NKJ})

We beg You, Lord God, make it so — now and forevermore.

Amen.