

## Opening

We've reached week 3 of Prayer and Self-Denial and by now will be well acquainted with the story of Esther. If you've not been able to join us for the last 2 weeks, I'd encourage you to look up our notes and listen to the messages – all 3 fit together like pieces of a puzzle. And in fact the well-known, often-quoted verse we've hit on today – *"Who knows but that you have come to your...position for such a time as this?"* – I see **as launching us** into a renewed vision and impetus for mission.

We'll see that the challenge Mordecai gave Esther may very well be the challenge that Christ has for you at this point in your life as we are all faced with asking this question of ourselves.<sup>1</sup> In other words, God has placed you where you are, has resourced you, has gifted you, has equipped you...to build his kingdom, to help his people, to fulfil his purposes. Nau te rourou, naku te rourou, ka ora te manuhiri | With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive.

Being Christian and God's mission go together. Furthermore, what Christ has done for us is enough motivation, provides the passionate zeal we require to launch us into a renewed vision for mission, reconnect with the great commission Jesus left us, where we must change gear, take a risk, step out and do something bold. *What will that be for you, in such a time as this?*

I'm going to bring you today's text in a moment, and what I want us to see is the *Influence* of Mordecai, Esther's *Identity* in God and her people and lastly, an *Invitation* to respond. Irrespective of age or ability or status we all have a role in God's mission. *What will that be for you, in such a time as this?*

Let me set the scene for today's verses: In the earlier chapters of Esther King Xerxes banishes Queen Vashti when she refused to come to his drunken party - *He was known for his drinking, lavish banquets, harsh temper, and sexual appetite.*<sup>2</sup> In his search for a new wife and Queen he chooses Esther, Mordecai's cousin. She's a Jew, one of a small minority in Persia at the time, but she manages to keep that a secret. Now, when Mordecai (also a Jew) refuses to bow to Haman, the King's advisor, Haman engineers a cunning plan to wipe out all the Jews, King Xerxes ordains it.

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<sup>1</sup> We all have a place and a purpose and a role in God's mission for us. All have a legitimate role.

<sup>2</sup> [Who was Xerxes in the Bible? | GotQuestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org/Who-was-Xerxes-in-the-Bible/)

Mordecai is grief stricken, because he's aware of the enormity of this decision. So Esther sends Hathach – a king's helper – to find out what's going on. When Hathach returns to Esther with the news of Haman's plan, and Mordecai's appeal to go to the king and plead for her people, Esther is faced with a dilemma. Does she *identify* with God, her people, the Jews, and act for God on their behalf? What is the right thing for her to do?

It was only after Esther hears Mordecai's second response (Vv. 12-14) that Esther launches into action.

(READ) Esther 4:12-14 *When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "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?"*

*And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*

In other words, I want to remind you Esther of who you are, of who you belong to, of who you represent. If all of the circumstances and years and trials of your life have brought you to this point, it is to make the right decision. No, no dilemma; God, has placed you there! Not for you to enjoy the perks of pomp and pleasure but as an instrument, in God's mission, to save his people. And God will do it, if not through you, God will still do it. But far better, it be you.

## **Influence**

So can we see the *influence* of Mordecai? He sees the big picture. He sees the need of all the people of Israel across the whole Persian empire. But instead of being overwhelmed, or delegating the task to somebody else, he calls on God in prayer and calls on Esther to speak to the King. He may have been grieved by Haman's plan but he was not intimidated by the size of the task in front of him. Mordecai's response is a high point of the story, and a clear statement of his faith in God's power to deliver them. Faith in God's power we must have! We can learn so much from Mordecai's approach, and his *influence*. Esther was the one in the end who went to the king but not without Mordecai's *vision* and *influence*.

Ross, that's a lovely story, but there's no way I can have that sort of *influence*? It's entirely possible that there are 130 "*Mordecais*" sitting in this room right now...

Influence can be negative...*influence* I'm talking about is having an inspiring and positive effect on those around us, for the sake of Gods kingdom.

Matt. 5:13-16 *"You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"*

2 Cor. 2:15 *For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?*

\*Your influence is bigger than what you think you can do, or what you feel you'd rather do; it is what God wants you to do. That, was Mordecais message to Esther.

God's mission is for anyone and everyone who is willing, and often God calls on unlikely people to take unlikely roles. Mordecai was a small-time official in a huge government of the biggest empire in the world. Small fish, large pond. But God had given him a big 'voice' with a lot of influence! And I want us to note at no point was this ever about himself. He wasn't the egomaniac Haman was. You'll note in 6:12 after Mordecai was honoured in the city streets he immediately went back to his humble work at the gate. His intention was never to have glory and human praise; his heart was to serve God.

*I love what C.S Lewis said: "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."* I think that's a key to kingdom influence.

*How can each of us bring an inspiring and positive effect to those around us, for the sake of Gods kingdom?*

Let me take you to the last verses (significant!) of the book to show the effects of Mordecais influence...

Esther 10:1-3 *King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.*

Saint Teresa of Avila- *Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours, yours are the eyes through which Christs compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now*<sup>3</sup>

*Influence!* God uses willing people, who bring what they have, in amazing ways. And here's the thing, God *resources* our willingness<sup>4 5</sup>.

There are several sentences we use that go against everything that God would have us thinking that negatively impacts our *influence*...see if you recognise any of these...

- *"Somebody else will do it"*
- *"I've been doing mission for years it's somebody else's turn"*
- *"I have no gifting in that area"*
- *"I'll do it next week, maybe"*
- *"I'm afraid of the response I'll get"*
- *"I don't feel called to that"* – talk to this one. You know we can get all mystical about this. God has given us all a "calling": It is to love him and love others. If we're doing that, then we're doing what we're called to!<sup>6</sup>

When God has placed you and given you something to do, if God is in it, he will resource you, he will surround you with the right people... for Esther that was Mordecai – She didn't feel she was up for it until Mordecai gave her a team talk. And for Mordecai that was Esther – she was the one who had to go to the king and do the hard mahi...

What Mordecais *influence* did was place Esther in a position of needing to think about her *identity*...

## **Identity**

C. S. Lewis - *I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.*<sup>7</sup>

Lewis' statement is about identity. He's saying what I see, I see through Christ and because of who I am in Christ, because my faith and my confidence are in Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Hole in our gospel, pg. 13

<sup>4</sup> Not talking about God giving us back stuff when we give him something. No, when we step out faith he will supply only and all the necessary resource. And maybe like Esther, the resource, is yourself. Being there...

<sup>5</sup> Think of the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 17, where the widows flour and oil never ran out. Think of Elisha in 2 Kings 4 where a widow is desperate to save her two sons from slavery, and God resourced her with oil, to sell to save her sons. It was only when they ran out of jars the oil stopped flowing. Think of the boy who gave Jesus his small lunch and watched as God resourced that mission and fed thousands of people.

<sup>6</sup> We're more at risk of resisting God than we are of operating outside his calling.

<sup>7</sup> Hole in Gospel, pg. 73

Our identity being in Jesus means that it's him, it's his word, it's his ways, his values, his truths that determine how I live my whole life.

When we are Christ followers we are not free to do or be whoever 'we' want to be, we are 'freed' to be who he wants us to be and do what he wants us to do...which is what, *for such a time as this*? It's his word that is truth, his word that is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path, Jesus Christ is the only truth. So who does he, say I am? And what would he have me make a priority?

Esther was forced to make a choice about her identity. When she discovered there were forces at work to kill the Jews, Esther's cousin Mordecai urges her to use her position in the palace at great risk to her life, in order to save her people:

*...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 knows it's a capital offense to approach the king and, although she's the queen, there's no guarantee at all he'll be merciful. Things didn't end well for the last queen! So what does she do? We have the benefit of knowing the end of the story, she didn't. Esther had to decide whether or not to identify with God and God's people, or save face and say nothing...*both come with risks*...her life *may potentially* be lost if she goes to the king, but it *will certainly* be lost if she doesn't.

So wrestling with the dilemma of what to do, but knowing what she needs to do, Esther says (v. 16) *"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."*

I love this response...it is a response of being confident in her identity in God. Esther realised through Mordecai's call to action she was not in the palace for herself, *but representing God, and for others*.

There is a myth associated with God's mission for us. And it is when the position God has placed you in and the thing he has led you to do is hard, hard work, there is personal cost attached, financial, your time, there is huge risk involved, the myth is, surely God's not in this, this is too hard, it's meant to be much easier.

Might be how it feels, but the truth is God (most likely) has put you there. Esther's response wasn't to cave in, no it was a call to prayer, "I'll do it" she said.

God knows how our story goes, he knows the end of our story...the point: irrespective of the risks, of what we face, of the temptations and the distractions, whatever it might be, Jesus is who we choose every time.

Some of us are in positions of influence in our culture—parents, caregivers, teachers, on boards, company executives, medical professionals, kaumatua, kuia—whatever it is you do, or where you are we are called upon (or will be) the question of our identity is put to the test, and more often than not, that will cost us.

Do we hold back the fact we're Christian? Do we withhold our views about certain matters because it's too risky to say anything? In wisdom, Gods mission requires us to be truth-livers and truth-proclaimers. There's a cost.

Some of us may even question how God can use us in his mission when we have our own moral and motive struggles whether in the past or present. All of us have baggage, stuff going on. Let me remind you that the bible is full of imperfect failing people, that God – by his grace – chose to use.

Wherever you are right now, you are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10). You have certain gifts, abilities, talents, moral and motivation failings, and experiences that enable you to help certain people—though it may cost you. It's never too late to hear and obey God's call. If you understand that you're his child, then your mission isn't for yourself, but for others. And who knows? Perhaps, you have come to your position for such a time as this.<sup>8</sup>

Esther risked her life for the sake of millions of Jews being saved. Her identity in God is what drove her mission. And it is our identity in Christ, the gospel and a "high view of Gods sovereignty"<sup>9</sup> that drives devotion to mission. Jesus died a single death, a single sacrifice for all time, for yours and mine and every human on the planets, sin (see 1 Cor. 15:3-8). Taking the punishment and guilt and shame that we rightly deserve for breaking Gods law, upon himself. Billions of people, trillions of sins, one sacrifice...

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<sup>8</sup> For Such a Time as This ([thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org))

<sup>9</sup> T4G 6: David Platt, "Divine Sovereignty: The Fuel of Death-Defying Missions" (Revelation 5:1-14) ([thegospelcoalition.org](http://thegospelcoalition.org))

And when we understand the enormity of that sacrifice, and God's grace, when we identify with that, we will want to spend the rest of our lives, living for him...being an influence for him, serving him...

I think one of the most important lessons that comes from the story of Esther is that God doesn't rely on us, he doesn't need us. He's God. He's sovereign. *For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.*

We can't do God any favours, we can't earn credit with God. But, before we throw our hands in the air and say what's the point then of mission? In his grace, he chooses to work with and through you and I for his purposes. He wants us to choose to obey *him*, go where *he* wants us to go and do what *he* wants us to do, motivated *only* for *his* glory.

So as we draw this 3 weeks' series to a close, we're at the beginning of a renewed vision and impetus for mission. I cannot tell you precisely what God's mission is for you, I don't know how many individuals must be reached for Christ in this nation, this city. I know one thing: Christ is yet to return and therefore the task is not yet done, because when it is Christ will come. Matt. 24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

## Invitation

God has placed you and I here *for such a time as this*. And it was Christ himself who left this message for us (universal)  
(Matt. 28:19, 20) *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

That alone, should put fuel in our tank, oxygen in our lungs and stoke our fire. My prayer is that a renewed emphasis for mission abroad and local would burn in our hearts. Praying, loving and supporting our mission partners, but also asking the question of God, what of me *for such a time as this?*<sup>10</sup> My prayer is that we would feel the absolute urgency of the day in which we live to engage with God's mission. Not if, but *how!*

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<sup>10</sup> Think of the Macedonian church: (2 Cor. 8:2, 3) "In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."

There's a powerful image for mission that comes from William Carey, this amazing man who blazed the trail of missions to India in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He saw his mission like a miner going into a deep mine, new territory, never before explored. At a now famous missionary society meeting in January of 1793, the matter of sending out missionaries was being discussed. As they talked about sending workers into the mine shaft to mine for the precious souls, Carey looked at his friends and said, "I'll go...I will go down the mine, if you will all hold the ropes for me."<sup>11</sup>...while we live, we should never let go of the rope."

Being Christian and God's mission go together. Everyone one of us are rope holders and every one of us are supported by those, holding the ropes; whether, we go, send, pray or financially support. We hold, will we...hold the ropes for all our mission partners, all on the frontline, NZBMS, all the Transsend workers. We hold the ropes for our...for each other...

I want us to leave this place today with these words and this challenge from Esther fresh on our minds.

*"Who knows but that you have come to your...position for such a time as this?"*

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<sup>11</sup> [Missionary Talks » Missionary Talks 41: William Carey \(part 1\)](#) and [Missions Exists Because Worship Doesn't | Desiring God](#)