

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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PRAYER FOCUS: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

Esther 3-4

October 30, 2022

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Our church has embarked upon a six-week prayer focus. This week, we are asking you to pray for increased mission and ministry engagement. Today's sermon has one point:

- You were made for such a time as this.

INTRODUCTION: Let me tell you the story of a queen. Her name was Esther, and while her story sounds like a fairy tale, it is very much true.

Esther was a Jewish orphan who was taken in and cared for by her cousin Mordecai. They lived in Susa, under the rule of King Xerxes. One day King Xerxes became angry with his queen and essentially divorced her. Looking for a new queen, the King arranged for a beauty contest. Attractive women were gathered and forced to participate. Esther won, and by no free choice of her own, she became the queen. At the same time that Esther was becoming established as King's Xerxes new wife, a man named Haman was working his way up the political chain and gaining power. Let's pick up the story in the book of Esther, chapter 3.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 3:1-5

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. ² All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. ³ Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" ⁴ Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was

enraged. ⁶ Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

EXPLANATION: Mordecai, Esther's cousin, would not bow to Haman. While it is not explicitly stated, the implication here is that Haman was seeking worship, and as a follower of the one true God, Mordecai would not oblige. This infuriated Haman so much that he sought a way not only to hurt Mordecai but to punish his family, friends, and anyone even remotely associated with him. Of course, Haman did not realize that the new queen was of Jewish descent.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 3:8-11

Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury." ¹⁰ So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

EXPLANATION: King Xerxes did not have a beef with the Jewish people. He just did not care. Without so much as a second thought, he took the word of his new right hand man and gave him carte blanche to do whatever he wanted to dispose of the problem. Haman devised a plan to kill them all.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 4:1-3

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

EXPLANATION: When Haman’s evil plan was publicized, the people were obviously greatly distressed. They began to pray, fast and cry out to God to intervene on their behalf. Mordecai made a very public exhibition of his petitions, so much so that Esther heard about his behavior.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 4:4-11

When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. ⁶ So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. ⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ “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 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. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

EXPLANATION: Obviously, Esther’s life was rather sheltered. She was unaware of Haman’s plans, the king’s unwitting participation, or her own people’s jeopardy. When Mordecai informed her and asked for her assistance, she reminded him of the palace rules. Even as queen, she had no right to go into the king’s presence unless called for, and it had been 30 days since the king last requested to see her. Breaking this rule was a crime punishable by death.

SCRIPTURE: Esther 4:12-14

When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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?"

EXPLANATION: Mordecai's message was less than sympathetic. Esther had a responsibility, and should word of her heritage get out, her very life might be in danger too. His words to Esther became a sort of battle cry, "This may be the reason God allowed you to be chosen."

Most of us know the rest of the story. After a period of prayer and fasting, Esther did go before the king. He spared her life, and she invited him to a special meal, along with Haman. After two such dinners, she finally mustered the courage to explain the situation to the king. Haman was given his due punishment, and the Jewish people were saved. Her entire story can be read in the book of Esther.

APPLICATION: Mordecai's famous reply is a question that is posed to us as well. Who knows but that you have come to this position for such a time as this?

I doubt there is anyone here who is a member of the royal family. I do not think we have any presidents or high-ranking government officials sitting among our congregation this morning, but this message is just as relevant for you and me.

Wherever God has placed us is a position of power. We have the power to do his will and to impact lives for the sake of the kingdom.

- Maybe you are a stay-at-home mom. You have the power to love and teach and raise your children for Christ.
- Maybe you are a businessman or woman. You have the power to display Christian ethics—honesty, fairness, kindness, and hard work—in the workplace.
- Maybe you are a student. You have the power to live with character and joy and to sit with the kid at lunch that no one else sits with.
- Maybe you are a senior adult who is homebound most of the time. You have the power to be an effective prayer warrior and to make calls to others.

Mission and ministry begin in our personal lives. We each have a responsibility to share the love of Christ with our families, our friends, and our coworkers. But Christian ministry also extends through the church.

SCRIPTURE: In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compared Christians to a body. He wrote: *“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.”*

ILLUSTRATION: Have you ever stubbed your toe or hit your thumb with a hammer? It’s hard to keep doing whatever it is you were doing before that pain hit you. For a minute or so, you are stopped, dead in your tracks. You may jerk your foot up and start rubbing that toe. You may stick your thumb in your mouth. In the grand scheme of things, what’s one toe? What’s one thumb? Yet science tells us that up to 90% of the control of our foot and the ability to balance come from the big toe! Some estimates say that the thumb is responsible for up to 40% of the movements of the hand. Without it, we lose the ability to grasp.

APPLICATION: God has brought you to this church, at this time, for a reason, and your engagement is essential to the health of this body. Just like each part of the body has a function, so do each of us have a function within the body of Christ—the church. Each of us has an important role to play, and when even one of us does not fulfill our purpose, the entire body is affected.

God is not dependent upon us. He can accomplish his work in any way that he chooses. If Esther had not gone before the king as Mordecai asked, God would have found another way to save his people. But what would Esther have lost? How many people would have suffered? We are given the privilege of being the hands and feet of Christ. God has given us our abilities, our skills, and our strengths for this very reason. He uses our experiences and even our pain so that nothing goes to waste. All of what makes us who we are, what brings us to this day, can be used to benefit God’s people and to help lead others to him.

I’ve learned a lot about the history of the church. For those who have been here for a long time, I ask you: were you there in the moment when things were happening in the past? For example, when the church had capital campaigns, were you involved? When the church had 1,200 in Bible study, were you helping or just receiving?

We are here, in this place, in this particular time. We are doing all kinds of ministry that the church did not do even ten years ago. But ten years ago was a different set of circumstances. And ten years from now, the church will have a different set of circumstances.

When I invite others to come here, my stump speech is that this is a place to serve. This is a place to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Right now, in this place, in this time, we need helpers. We need drivers, we need a youth Bible study teacher. I never thought having a youth teacher would be so hard to get. We need greeters.

When I first came here, we went for weeks and even months with almost no visitors other than family members who came on Mother's Day and Father's Day. Nolensville Rd was in decline. A person in real estate told me that people would not be attracted to his area unless we had a new school. We have one now. We have new businesses in the area. We've had more visitors in the last sixth months than I ever remember.

For such time as this, Esther was in the right place, at the right time. Let us be mindful of the opportunities around us that require our involvement so we don't miss the blessing.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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