

Text: Esther 4:1-17

Title: “Reject Passivity ... Accept Responsibility”

INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION – I was thinking again this week about the life of Brooks Douglass who shared his story with us on Easter Sunday. If you were here you may remember that when Brooks was a teenager a horrific tragedy occurred in his family that would forever change everything for him. Two strangers entered their home, murdered Brooks’ father (who was a well-known pastor), his mother, and shot Brooks and his sister leaving them to die. After that awful event Brooks’ life took many twists and turns. He was a naturally gifted person and ended up becoming the youngest state senator in Oklahoma history. Yet all the outward success in his life masked the inward reality that he had never fully dealt with the murder of his parents. He was still filled with hatred for the men who had destroyed his family and his life. In his role as a senator he found himself one day visiting the prison where one of the killers was waiting on death row. After cutting through the red tape, Brooks was finally allowed to sit down face to face with the killer. He just wanted some answers. The man had apologized, but Brooks wasn’t sure he was sincere. After grilling the killer for two hours, Brooks got up, ready to walk out the door, when the killer once more said, “I’m truly sorry.” Brooks said that he felt the Lord saying to him, “You’re not finished here.” Brooks didn’t step out of the door; he stepped back toward the death-row inmate, and the two men embraced. Brooks hadn’t realized the hate and unforgiveness in his heart were so strong until it all came pouring out like a flood of water on the prison floor. His life would never be the same after that encounter.

I’m here to tell you today that you could be one decision, one choice, one act of obedience away from a breakthrough in your life with God ... just one step away from a changed life?

Let’s open our Bibles to Esther 4. Quick review of what we’ve learned to this point in our study of Esther: King Xerxes rules the massive Persian Empire. His capitol is the city of Susa in modern day Iran. Xerxes dumps his first wife, Queen Vashti, and conducts a nationwide competition of the most beautiful women in the empire to become his new queen. A stunningly beautiful young Jewish woman named Esther is in the competition and she wins. All the while she has kept secret the fact that she is a daughter of the covenant people of God, the Jews. Because her parents died when she was young, Esther was adopted by her cousin, a man named Mordecai, who has become a high official in the government of King Xerxes. The number two man in the government is a mean-spirited creep by the name of Haman. When Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman, Haman is so enraged that he devises a plot to kill, not just Mordecai, but all the Jews in Persia.

Let me say that to this point in the story, up through Chapter 3 of Esther, from a spiritual perspective, we don’t see anything very commendable or admirable about Mordecai and Esther, particularly Esther. She never talks about God. She has no problem compromising her morals as a young Jewish woman. She’s far from perfect. But here in Esther 4 she is just one step away, one act of obedience away, from a completely new chapter in her life. Will she stay stuck in Chapter 3, or will she move to the next chapter God has for her?

What about you? Are you stuck in a chapter in your life ... a chapter where you haven’t really been that serious about your relationship with God, where you haven’t been that concerned about doing

God's will for your life, where the people around you really don't know where you stand? You're one step away, one act of obedience away, from a new chapter in your life.

Well, let's see what happens here in Esther 4.

Esther 4:1 - 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.

Esther 4:2 - But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.

Esther 4:3 - 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.

What's happened here is that Mordecai has learned of the plot to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire. This could be one of the darkest moments in the history of the world. Mordecai and all the Jews of the land are heartbroken, and in those days they expressed it by dressing the way Mordecai did ... in sackcloth and ashes ... sort like we wear black today to express mourning or grief.

Esther is in the palace, oblivious to Haman's plan to kill all the Jews; Mordecai is outside on the street. They cannot speak in person. So in vv.4-14 what we have is Mordecai and Esther carrying on this conversation back and forth through a messenger. If it were today, they might be messaging or texting back and forth. And here's how that might have gone:

Esther: Just heard UR outside dressed all shabby. W'sub?

Esther: Sending my assistant 2 U with some clean clothes.

Mordecai: U won't believe what's happening. ICYMI Haman is plotting 2 have all the Jews slaughtered soon. Paying big bucks 2 king for permission 2 do it.

Mordecai: Here's the link 2 law the king has signed: www.persia.gov/killtheJews.

Mordecai: U must do something ASAP. Go 2 the king & beg him 2 stop this. You're his queen; he'll listen 2 you.

Esther: I can't just walk n & talk 2 the king without a special invitation. If I try they'll kill me.

Mordecai: U can't just sit there & do nothing. If Haman wins you'll die too ... so what do U have 2 lose????

Mordecai: Something else. God will take care of his people. If you don't step up & help the Jews, deliverance will come from someone else.

Mordecai: OMT ... God may have put U where U are for such as time as this?

Now let's just stop the conversation right there. This is a defining moment for Esther. *Defining* moments are *deciding* moments. Remember that she is a woman with two identities ... two names. She is Esther, the beautiful queen immersed in the pagan Persian culture, and she is Haddasah, a Jewish woman and a daughter of the covenant people of God. Up to this point she has successfully hidden the fact that she belongs to the people of God. How will she respond to the challenge? Will she stay stuck in Chapter 3 of her life, or will she move on and take her place in the next chapter of God's will for her life?

Well, let's see what Esther does. Read vv.15-17. Look again at v.16. Notice two things:

- To this point we never see Esther talking about God or talking to God, but now she seems to know that she needs God's help. That's why she asks Mordecai to get all his friends together to fast. (To fast means to not eat, sometimes not drink, for a period of time to demonstrate your brokenness before and dependence on God.) And it usually goes along with serious prayer. Why? She knows she can't take this step on her own. She needs divine help.
- The other thing is that she is now ready to risk everything to do what she seems to know is the will of God for her life. Even though it is against the law for her to approach the king without a special invitation, she says, "If I perish, I perish."

You see, Esther is one step away ... one act of obedience away from the next exciting chapter of God's will for her life. And she's willing to risk everything to take that step. What's the next step God has for you in His exciting will for your life? Will you reject the passivity and accept responsibility for the decisions you need to make to take your place in the will of God? Remember *defining* moments are *deciding* moments. If you are ready to take the next step here's what it will mean:

1. GOD IS CALLING ... OBEY HIM.

God used Mordecai to speak to Esther. And sometimes that's how we hear God's call to us. God speaks to us through a human messenger calling us to Himself. Sometimes God uses a tragedy in our lives to speak to us. Sometimes God uses a failure to call us out. Sometimes it happens without warning when we're reading along in God's Word and He speaks like He's never spoken before saying, "Alright, I'm taking you to the next chapter of my will for your life."

The next step may be the first step for some of you. All this talk about a relationship with God and doing the will of God begins with the decision to trust in Christ for the first time. You realize that when Christ died on the Cross and rose again, God purchased the right to run your life. And in faith you let him do that.

The next step for you may be to quit playing the church game and get serious about passionately following Christ. Spiritual maturity doesn't have anything to do with how long you've been a member of the church. Sadly, I know people who have been faithfully going to church but there is

no discernible growth in Christlikeness ... in their attitude, in their lifestyle, in their service to God and others.

Hebrews 5:12 - In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.

It's time for you to walk away from that unholy relationship. It's time for you stop spending all your money on yourself and begin to give your tithes and offerings to God. It's time for you start talking to your friends about Jesus.

The next step for you may be to really step out into the unknown and take your place in God's amazing redemptive activity in this world. The next chapter for you will be to do something extraordinary with your life in service to God. And that leads me to the next thing:

2. GOD IS MOVING ... JOIN HIM.

Listen, God is moving here in Esther. His name is never mentioned, His Law is never mentioned, but make no mistake, God is the moving force behind all of these circumstances swirling around Esther. There's a spiritual battle raging between God and Satan, between the Kingdom of Light and the kingdom of darkness. The stakes are high. If the covenant people of God are all slaughtered from where will the Messiah come. But, of course, God will not let that happen. His purposes will not be thwarted. The question is this: Will you be a person, an instrument that God uses to bring about His deliverance and His redemption, or will He have to find someone else?

That's what Mordecai seems to be saying in ...

Esther 4:14a - For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place...

There's no question that God will bring deliverance; the question is whether or not you will join Him in that. Will you stay stuck in that selfish chapter in your life where you spend all your time, all your energy, all your money on yourself, or will you reject passivity and take responsibility.

You see Esther became a mediator with the king at great risk. And the Bible says that Jesus did that for the whole world that was separated from God because of our sin. When Jesus died on the cross He became the bridge making it possible for sinful people to have a relationship with a holy God. We deserved to perish, but Jesus perished in our place. That's the Gospel...

2 Corinthians 5:18 – God ... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

2 Corinthians 5:19 - that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God is moving. People are going to be saved through Jesus Christ. The question is will we join Him in what He is doing. Something else...

3. GOD IS FAITHFUL ... TRUST HIM.

Esther can't see it, but God has already set her apart for this great work of deliverance. He has already prepared for her protection when she breaks the law to go to speak to the king. Listen, when you take a leap of faith to obey God and join God, you're leaping into the arms of Jesus. You don't have to be afraid to move to the next chapter of God's will for your life. God is in that chapter.

One of the most important personalities in the Bible is a man named Simon Peter. He was Jesus' main man. One day Peter and the other disciples were out on the Sea of Galilee when a huge storm came up. It was so awful that they feared their boat would sink and they would die. But in the midst of the storm Jesus came to them walking on the water. They were terrified, but Jesus assured them, "Take courage; it is I." Peter said, "Lord, let me come to you on the water." And Jesus said, "Come on." Peter climbed out on the boat and did something he had never done before ... he walked on water to Jesus.

Peter was just one step away from a changed life. Just think about it, out of the boat, out on the water, for however long Peter was there he got a taste of living a totally supernatural life ... a life totally sustained by Christ. And today, you are just one step away from getting out of the boat and walking on the water with Jesus.