

WELCOME 21st August 2022 – 11 Pentecost '22 C

Esther 5, 6 & 7

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Today we continue exploring God's word to us through the book of Esther as a family of disciples... **Bible Study Qs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & so you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.**

As we move into this week... There's nothing so annoying as a **jigsaw** puzzle with a piece missing or a **book** with pages torn out. And nothing so exciting, satisfying & powerful as the people of God fully engaged in the work God has set before them.

Like a puzzle, God's people are a unique combination of interlocking pieces that reveal a complete picture only when each is connected to the others. Like a great book, the whole narrative can be told only when each page is in its proper order bound to all the others.

That's the way God works in the world. When his uniquely shaped & gifted individual people do what he has called them to do, he connects them piece by piece to reveal more & more of his sovereign & saving plan for the world.

You are the body of Christ & each one of you is a part of it. – 1 Cor 12:27

Your faithful acts of obedience are neither random nor insignificant but may be the missing piece that brings about the fulfilment of one part of God's plan. Bound together with other parts you make known his holy purposes in the world.

"On the third day of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes & entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance."

Against the backdrop of God's redeeming saving love... Esther reminds us... God's saving purpose & life-giving plan is revealed & fulfilled through the intentional everyday acts of his faithful & obedient people... when **YOU** are God's plan.

We'll explore & experience that together... Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Father you have dressed us in the righteousness of Christ & filled us with the power of the Holy Spirit...so we draw near in the confidence of loved children, the assurance of heirs with Christ of your glory, & the boldness of those who bear your name & promise of salvation to the world... Wash us again today in your word of truth & the hope of salvation lived in your presence forever...In Jesus' Name ...Amen.

Let's hear the story of Esther again today...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When have you seen a "small thing" make a "big difference"?
2. Where would you like to make a difference for Jesus?
What would be required for that to happen?

11 PENTECOST '22 C – GOD'S SILENT SOVEREIGNTY: WHEN YOU ARE GOD'S PLAN

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true." – ML King, Jr

Attributed to ML King Jr... sounds a lot like Mordecai summoning Esther to her calling - ...to make the case for God's people ^{b/4} the king...to be an advocate for those about to be crushed by injustice & slaughtered by evil. Remember his final challenge: "**Don't** think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance & relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you & your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" Silence...shrinking back...path of least resistance...self-preservation...reject your calling...live contrary to your identity as one of God's chosen...faltering in the face of fear or threat is death for her & those she loves. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Still true...God will act...as CS Lewis said...

"For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference **TO YOU** whether you serve like Judas or like John." – CS Lewis

It makes a difference to the world too & Esther knows it. "**On** the **third day** of the fast, Esther put on her royal robes & entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance." If Xerxes spots someone in court he has not summoned they're as likely to die as anything. **BUT...** For the 1st time in her life Esther swims against the current. During the whole year of preparation for her bedroom audition to be queen, she strictly followed the advice of Mordecai & Hegai (harem's boss eunuch). For the last 5 yrs, she has not put a foot out of place even though **SHE IS** Queen & has for the last month been excluded from the King's private chambers...others in the harem occupied his time.

Why now? Why especially now after a harsh 3 day fast which will certainly affect her looks/beauty/dim that sparkle that caught Xerxes' attention in the 1st place? It is now for the 1st time that **Esther** owns her identity as one of God's chosen. **She** embraces her call & **She** chooses to live consistent with both...despite the risk. How many self-ID Xns could be convicted on the available evidence?

Esther lives right where you & I live...in the tension ^{b/t} trusting God...& living in faith/obedience. Trusting that the Father will act in our lives – rescue – make a way for us – protect - provide while knowing simultaneously she/we are called to make wise/meaningful/faithful choices in the narrow confines of his purposes & plans in the every-day places we live/move/have our being. World? Wagga? Kids/G-kids/Friends?

2 truths exist side by side under the surface of the whole story. 1.) God is completely Sovereign...nothing happens outside his dominion. 2.) We are accountable for faithful obedient meaningful significant choices in our daily lives. This moment is Esther's...yours & mine will be different but no less critical & we are no less accountable. *Rom 14:10 & 12 - Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God...Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. God wants to know, "What did you do w/ that resurrected life I gave you in my Son by his Spirit w/in you?"*

Esther & her maids & Mordecai & the Jews have been fasting...which simply means sitting quietly allowing God to prepare Esther's heart free from distractions for the essential work of her calling...prepare her heart free from distractions for obedience & faith ^{b/4} the king to seek his reprieve from this death sentence...In her fasting she is seeking THE KING above the king. In her fasting she is laying her life (*if I die I die*) ^{b/4} THE KING above all kings. She might now look worried or drawn, but the One she's trying to please cares more about her heart than her appearance.

The battle w/ evil is won/lost here in our hearts. What has our attention has us. What has your attention...occupies your thinking...dwell on? Past hurt? \$\$ worry? Covid? **Ps 86:11** - *Teach me your way, O Lord, so I may walk in your truth; (rely on your faithfulness) give me an undivided heart to revere (fear) your name.* In fasting she has no other focus than her identity as one of God's chosen & her calling to advocate for the lives of those about to be destroyed by evil. For you...**Since** you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your hearts on the realities of heaven...*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things...* – Col 3:1-2 God is in charge & she's/we've got a call to live out. **Let** us run with endurance the race God has set before us. *We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source & perfecter of our faith.* – Heb 3:2 Mt 28:18-20 Acts 1:8 2 Tim 2:2

What we know in this whole narrative: there is not going to be a part-the-Red-Sea miracle in Susa. No lightning strike takes out Haman. No David/Goliath battle. From this point forward a series of private conversations & a sleepless night will change the shape of the future for the Jews under Xerxes. Too many times I believe we think God only works when Lazarus climbs up from his tomb or there's some demonstrable thunderclap announcing God's deliverance. Stop waiting for the silver bullet or the golden ticket...Private conversations...sleepless nights...wisdom of those who know...faithful obedient meaningful significant choices in our daily lives... Xerxes receives Esther & welcomes her invitation to a banquet in his honour where only he, Haman & Esther are present. He is doubly pleased to receive a 2nd such honour the next day. Remember...Xerxes thrives on power & popular opinion. He loves showing off & being honoured. Had Esther made her plea in front of his whole

court the likelihood is she would have been denied...but in private where she alone can favour him w/ her attention & her pleas...she has his undivided willing attention.

Haman...on the other hand...is never satisfied. He possesses power 2nd only to the king honour/riches undreamed & Mordecai lives rent-free in his head. 1 guy won't bow & Haman is undone by rage. **Pride** goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. –

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honour. - Pr 16:18/18:12

Haman's pride, his unrestrained wrath, his boasting whether for him or anyone else always leads to the same end: destruction. Whether it comes quickly or slowly, pride always leads to defeat...humiliation...devastation. And his boasting...it's boring: possessions, performance & position – accomplishments, achievements & accumulations... But isn't it odd the people he's bragging to are either already convinced he's awesome OR they're riding his coattails to glory...they're not about to contradict him or challenge his boast...they're applauding his ranting & goading him to do what any man of his exalted stature would do...lash out at his "enemy" publicly. **BUT...**

That night the king had trouble sleeping, so he ordered an attendant to bring the book of the history of his reign so it could be read to him. In those records he discovered an account of how Mordecai had exposed the plot of Bigthana & Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the door to the king's private quarters. They had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes. "What reward or recognition did we ever give Mordecai for this?" the king asked. His attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him." This is the crucial point in the whole narrative. This is the center: 3 feasts ^{b/4} it, 3 feasts after it. 29 mentions of Susa ^{b/4} it & 29 after it. Haman has the upper hand in every chapter ^{b/4}; Mordecai after. The story shifts here... This is the pivot point for the entire book. No coincidences for the child of God.

We know how this works out...King can't sleep & orders his memoirs to be read. To Xerxes' shock he discovers he hasn't honoured Mordecai for saving his life. Seems Haman can't sleep either. Haman's dreaming of revenge. Xerxes is dreaming of honour. Haman dreams of wreaking vengeance on Mordecai Xerxes says honour him...Haman dreams of masquerading as king but is forced to dress Mordecai for that privilege. Haman dreams of killing Mordecai & everyone like him...but it is Haman whose death settles the angry king. No coincidences for the child of God.

Neither Esther nor Mordecai have performed a miracle. There is nothing seemingly spiritual or supernatural in anything they do...but we see & encounter God's activity in our lives & in this world often through the very common ordinary events of life **IF** we're willing to let God use them & **US IN THEM** according to his will & purpose. God's saving purpose & life-giving plan is revealed & fulfilled through the intentional everyday acts of his faithful & obedient people. That's the way God works in the world. When his uniquely shaped & gifted individual people do what he has called

them to do, he connects them piece by piece to reveal more & more of his sovereign & saving plan for the world. **You** are the body of Christ & each one of you is a part of it. – 1 Cor 12:27
God's will WILL be done.

God **WILL** draw into his eternal life more & more people. The harvest is plentiful. How? Through His people faithfully sharing the gospel...& making the life of Christ a visible reality in this world. God **WILL** overthrow all tyrants. Injustice **WILL** fall ^{b/4} the righteous justice of God. How? When? God sent Jesus into the world to defeat much larger & deadly enemies than Haman. His work is finished...the final restoration is yet to come...but **IT WILL COME.**

Until then... **Since** God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, & patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, & forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach & counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms, hymns & spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. – Col 3:12-17 Your faithful acts of obedience are neither random nor insignificant but may be the missing piece that brings about the fulfilment of one part of God's plan. Bound together w/ other parts you make known his holy purposes in the world.

Like Esther (John & not Judas) own your identity as one of God's chosen. Embrace your call & Live consistent with both...despite the risk.

TAKE IT HOME –

Whether you believe it or not, the Father uses your hands as he builds his kingdom.

How do you see yourself contributing to God's bigger plan (in some small way) this week? Especially as a faithful minority in an increasingly pagan world... & If not, why not?

Let's pray...

Father when we confront the overwhelming dimension of sin in our world & in our own hearts, let us not be disillusioned or dispirited. Let us not lose faith in you because of the faithlessness we experience. Let us see your work as wonderful & worthy of praise & pursuit. Let us live with a faithful obedient expectant spirit which is eager for good, buoyant in hope, confident for triumph because you are the ultimate victor of good over evil....through Jesus Christ...Amen