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Expository Sermon

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POSITION....DECISION....ACTION.

Scripture Reading – Esther 4:1-17. Text – Esther 4:14.

Introduction

Esther was a young Jewish queen who came to the throne after Queen Vashti had refused to obey the command of her drunken husband Xerxes, to expose her beauty to his intoxicated friends in the court. The king was wrong in what he did because it went against the custom of the court to do this. But the King was so drunk that protocol was ignored. The disobedience of Vashti so enraged the King that he deposed her. It was about four years later that the Kings servants came to him and urged him to find a queen to replace Vashti. After an intensive careful search, Esther was the choice. She was a beautiful Jewish woman who had been orphaned as a child. Apparently, she had no brothers and sisters to care for her and so Mordecai who was related to her by marriage took her as his own daughter. She was an obedient child, and even when she was queen, she sought his advice. And on Mordecai's advice, Esther did not reveal her nationality.

In the mean time Mordecai discovered that two of the King's officers conspired to kill the King. When he found out the plot, he told Esther who in turn told the King giving credit to Mordecai. This bought Mordecai into favor with the King. It was not long after this that the king promoted a man by the name of Haman to be prime minister. Xerxes commanded that all the royal officials at the King's gate should kneel and pay honor to Haman, but Mordecai refused. This enraged Haman, and when he heard that Mordecai was a Jew, he was determined to destroy all the Jews in the land. His determination was so intense and his rage so passionate that he persuaded the king to issue a decree sealed with the royal signet ring that all the Jews be destroyed, and the Bible tells that, "the edict was signed and the King and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa fell into confusion." There was great mourning among the Jews fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Mordecai was one of the mourners. When Esther inquired as to the reason he was doing it, He told her of the plot to kill the Jews, and warned her that just because she was part of the royal family, she must not think that she would escape when all the other Jews would be killed. "If you remain silent at this time," he said, "relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place but you and your family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14. This was the challenge. It left no room for neutrality. It was not a moment for hesitating weakness. Esther has arrived at a watershed in her life. She had come to the crossroads and a decision had to be made. "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" Her destiny was challenging her. These moments tremble with eternal significance. The balance of her nation's life rested in her hands. This was the ultimate challenge of her destiny. What should she do? It is clear that so much depended on her decision. Note will you,

1. ESTHER'S RANK OR ESTHER'S POSITION. Esther 4:14.

Esther had risen to a royal position which was one of the prestigious positions in the nation. There is no doubt Esther's rise to royalty was part of the providential

design of God for His people. This marriage went against Persian law but prejudice had been aside to make her queen. This marriage was against Persian law that held that one of royal line must marry a wife belonging to one of the seven great families. But a member of a captive race, part of slave crowd, became, in the purpose of God, an active participant of the royal family. She became queen of the greatest empire the world has ever known. But God had put her there for a purpose. She discovered and accepted that purpose and acted upon it. Notice when this challenge came to her. Note

a. The Comfort She Enjoyed. Esther 4:14. She was now of royal rank. She was queen living in comfortable affluence. To go to the King and beg for mercy and plead with him for her people was extremely dangerous. The nation knew that anyone who approached the King without being summoned by him would be put to death. So why disturb her comfort by taking a stand on this uncomfortable and dangerous issue. There is nothing essentially wrong with comfort and affluence. It is a liability however, when it becomes an intoxicant and addiction sets in with such intensity that all energies are given over to preserving those comfort zones. This becomes a danger and is wrong when these things are allowed to hinder us from finding and fulfilling our destiny in God's will. None of us likes to move out of our comfort zones for that means the denial of self. It is an obstacle when we are so comfortable that serving God is simply considered one of a number of options instead of a priority.

There is an unspoken philosophy in some of the church these days, which says, "I will serve God as long as it fits into my agenda and does not take me out of my comfort zone." Esther could have taken that position for she was comfortable in her role as queen. She had to choose between her royal position and principle – between comfort or commitment to her conscience. She could have refused to move out of the luxury of her comfort zone and miss her destiny in life. She would have been submerged into the mire of mediocrity with a life that was centered in self. The life that chooses to remain in the comfort zone to please self, does not change circumstances nor influence the world to come to the

knowledge of God. Taking up permanent residence in comfort zones does not inspire or encourage selfless service to God and society. Esther was willing to step out of her comfortable life-style to sacrifice her life for her people. She was willing to break her ties to her royal position and luxurious affluence to save her people. But it is important to note,

b. The Concern she showed. Esther 4:14. Comfort zones tend to keep us from being in touch with the pain and ugliness of life. It has a tendency to numb us to the needs of our society and the challenges of the contemporary world life.

Initially her life in the royal court isolated from the world outside of the court and was ignorant of the danger facing her people. Esther was not fully aware of the danger that surrounded her. She was living close to disaster and appeared to be unaware of it. There were forces at work which were planning to destroy and her people and she was oblivious of it all. In this moment of crisis, she was called upon to take a stand for the right. Mordecai's concern for the safety of her people became her concern. Disregarding the danger she said asked Mordecai to "gather all the Jews together in Susa and fast and pray for three days, day or night." Then she determined "I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." v. 16. Her concern for her nation transcended her comfort zone and her fear. Her rank did not stop her from standing on principle. Note further note,

2. HER RESPONSIBILITY. Esther 4:16.

Esther accepted the challenge and she said, "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law and if I perish I perish." Into her comfortable lifestyle came the wind of change and the truth broke in upon her with a shattering impact. Her life and that of her people were hanging by a thread. She was awakened to the fact that the stupendous events of her life had not happened by chance. She had been carried away as a captive by the invading Persian armies. It was a miracle that a Jewish girl would rise to be queen over a people that were not her own. It is clear that she realized that the sphere of her influence in which God had placed her was to be used in His service and her people. She was to be the

instrument which God used to the saving of others. She had “come to the royal position for such a time as this.” The challenge was to go into the presence of the King and plead on behalf of her people. Here once again we realize that the blessings and privileges that God gives to his servants are accompanied by corresponding responsibilities. With every blessing, there is a responsibility. God gives us personal advantages to be used in His service. Esther made this discovery. In her comfort zone she settled on,

a. New Priority. Esther 4:16. It was a priority, which took her out of her comfort zone to a commitment to do what it would take to save her people. Her words

clarify this in verse 16. “.... I will go to the King, even though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Her priority enlarged her vision of what her God given purpose was as queen over the one of the most powerful nations of the earth at that moment in history. Her perception of the meaning of her royal position had changed. No longer would she be secure in the comfort and power of that position in the nation. Mordecai challenged her “Who knows but, that you have come to royal position for such a time is this?” She made that her priority and carried her responsibility with dignity and courage. She was willing to lay aside her comfortable life style and the measure of authority she possessed to save her people. She was God’s instrument in this time of crises in the nation. She could not divorce herself from her people. Her life was inextricably tied up with others. It was for others that God had placed her in her position, and it was for others that she put herself on the line. She discovered this new priority in life. There is challenge for each of us here. We cannot be tied to Christ and His purposes and distance ourselves from others. Jesus died for the world, and the challenge of the Cross is for us to reach others. This is the nature of God’s love. The benefits of the Gospel are not simply given to us for our own security, blessings and joy, but that we should instruments of God’s message of salvation to our society. Jesus died for you personally, but you are not to act as though you are the only one for whom He died. “Freely have we received of His grace and so freely we must give.” The challenge is still with us “who knows that but

that you have come to this place and this point in your life for such a time as this in our world.” God has brought us thus far in life for a purpose. Esther in her royal position is the given responsibility to save her people from a certain death. The salvation of her people became her new priority. But tied to together with this new priority,

b. A New Principle was established in her life. Esther 4:16. “I will go to the King even though it is against the law and if I perish, I perish! This principle was very simple. It was the principle of selfless sacrifice. This principle was to dominate her life. “If I perish I perish.” These words capsule this principle. If Esther were going to make a difference in her situation, she would have to deny self and act selflessly and decisively, even though she might loose everything she enjoyed as the queen of a powerful nation. She took an action that might result in the loss of everything including her own life. Her decision to go to the King put everything on the line. She is the perfect example of one who was willing to deny herself in the interest of the others.

This surely, is one of the hallmarks of Christianity. This is what Christian discipleship is all about. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and follow me.” To follow Christ – To be His disciple means to deny self, for one cannot be full of self and exemplify the spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is always self-giving. One has pointed out that, the philosopher Socrates said “Know thyself. Freud said Be yourself. Jesus said give yourself.” In an age, and even at times in the church, which is in pursuit of self-realization, there is not much interest in this kind of Christianity. Nevertheless, we always need to continually take a long hard look at Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross, and realize that self sacrifice is part of the substance of the gospel, and it is indispensable to the spread of the gospel. The world cannot be changed for the better by living on and guided by the principle of self-centeredness. Take a long hard look at Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and ask yourself as to what it says to you? What is the essence of its message? It is true that it is a revelation of His redeeming love.. He procured salvation for each one of us. But what does it expect of us? It

challenges each one to service and surely self-sacrifice for others is the pulse of or the heart beat of service to Him. Can we who are His followers do less than what He has done for us? Salvation has a high price tag to it. It cost Jesus His life and did not Jesus say “take up your cross and follow me.” That means our convenience does not matter. Our comfort zones are dispensable. Our plans may have to be set aside. Our popularity may have to be thrown to the four winds. It does mean that our desires must conform to His desires. Take up your Cross and follow me. In the days of Rome, this meant that the criminal was going to have his life ended. Cecil B. Knight wrote, “There are those who are looking for a deluxe brand of salvation without a Cross, but they are more in search of salve than salvation. You can have religion without crucifixion but not Christianity.” The message of the gospel has the mark and the stain of blood upon it. Not just the Blood of Christ, but the blood of a thousands upon thousands of martyrs who were commanded to renounce Christ and His message, and they stood to their feet cried “No! And if I perish I perish.” And thousands perished. They lived by the principle of selflessness. The emblem and symbol of our faith is not cushion but a cross. There are those this morning that are not only enlisting, but re-enlisting in the military knowing full well that they could lose their lives. Is it not true that they are saying in effect, “I will enlist and if I perish I perish if it will preserve our freedoms.” Anything worthwhile has a price tag attached to it. Esther held the life of a nation in her hands. She was willing to step out of comfort zone and say “I will go to the King, even though it against the law, and if I perish I perish.” She shouldered her responsibility to her people. But what we also see here,

3. HER RELEVENCY. Esther 4:14. Mordecai said to her and “who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this.” The name of God is not mentioned in this book. Yet we see His shadow everywhere. We trace His footprints in every circumstance. In the drama that takes place there is clear evidence of the overruling and directing providence of God. He brought Esther to the throne of the most powerful nation of that day at this specific time in history.

There were moments in Jewish history when God appeared to His people, and it is relatively easy to respond to those revelations. Let us never forget, however, that many times while God may appear to be in hiding, He always acting and accomplishing what is His will and purposes. He does have to be seen in order to act on behalf His people. He selected Esther to be His instrument of deliverance for his captive people. God had put her into this significant position, and there was purpose in His positioning of her in her life. When He places someone in a certain place or specific hour in time, He always does it for reason. Esther was not placed in this environment by accident. There are two basic reasons why it was not accidental that we find Esther living as queen. There was design in God's planning for her to be the Queen of Persia. The first reason is,

a. God's Purposes for her were relevant. Esther 4:14. "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" It was this moment that was filled with danger for the people of God. She was the only one who could act on their behalf, for God had placed her in the royal court with the position of power to save her people in the hour of crisis. He had placed her at the right moment when the nation needed her influence. This is what makes her relevant. God always places His children in a place of service at the right moment. God is always on time. He Himself acted at the right moment, for the scripture tells us that in the fullness of time God sent His Son. Esther could have retreated into obscurity. She could have said, "I am not going to get involved. I do not have time to handle this situation. It is too big for me. There are too many duties demanded of me by the court and in any event I am not going to endanger myself for others. She could have taken this position. However, she did not, and God was able to use her to salvage His people. God had chosen her to do this and she stepped up to the plate to fit into God's plan for her. God's purposes for her were relevant. The second reason is that,

b. God's Purposes for her were Redemptive. Esther 4:14. "Who knows but that you have come to royal position for this time danger facing her people? What is so amazing is that this slip of a girl, a captive of a foreign nation was chosen by

God to fulfill his purposes to save his people from being destroyed. It seemed like the crisis she faced was impossible. She was confronted by insurmountable odds. What could one woman do against such powerful enemies? There were two things implied here that were in her favor, in fact they made her invincible in this situation. Firstly

i. God put her there. That makes her immovable. She was there by Divine appointment and Divine approval. It was vital that God's people be saved for He had selected His people to be the nation through which redemption would come. A Messiah would emerge from this nation to be the Savior of the world. It was true that while God at times had severely punished His people; He would not allow them to be destroyed. He always stepped in power to redeem them. This nation was to be the instrument of His saving purposes. The second reason why she was invincible was;

ii. She was reinforced by the presence of the saving power of God. In Esther 4:16, she requested that all the Jews who were in Susa would fast for her. In the scriptures, prayer is usually assumed to accompany fasting. When Esther asks for her people to pray fast for her (v.16) it is presumably a request for intercessory prayer. She was dependent on God for help in this time of crisis. When God calls a person to fulfill His purposes, he gives them his power to enable him to accomplish it. God's requirements are accompanied by his enablements. But what is significant here, is the kind of instrument God selects to use. **Esther was a vulnerable beautiful young Jewish woman.** She was not the kind of woman you would imagine to be savior of her people. Certainly she was not the kind of woman you would think would march boldly into the Kings court and make demands of him. She would probably be our last choice, yet God selected and used her to bring deliverance to her people. God's choices always interesting and so often confound human logic. The hymn writer wrote that "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm." God's decisions and actions are so often shrouded in mystery. His choices are beyond understanding. He chose a

shepherd boy David to kill a giant with one stone. Jesus used a little boy's lunch of a few loaves and fishes to feed five thousand men besides the woman and children. God's purposes are not hindered or restricted by our lack of ability, but rather by our lack of availability. What God wants first are available instruments? God will only use available instruments, and He then will take any willing instrument and accomplish his purposes for them and through them.

Conclusion

I would echo the words of Mordecai to Esther "Who knows that you have come to this position for such a time as this." In God's plan and purposes there is no one who is insignificant, and no one that God cannot use. So often, the most unlikely person is the one who God will use in most difficult circumstances. We are called first to be witnesses to the life transforming grace of the Cross and the saving power of God in our lives. We are called to be surrendered instruments in His hand to be used by Him in the way He chooses. He will take the little we have and empower it to accomplish great things. There may be those who feel that they do not have much and that they are limited in talent and ability. However, our limitations are not limited when we give them to God and He takes over. Did not Jesus take a little boy's lunch of five loaves and two fishes and feed the multitude. The issue that day was not how small the lunch was, and how willing he was to give it up, but how great the Savior was to multiply it. It was when the little lunch was totally given into the Savior's hands that the miracle took place. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. God and you can make a difference. You may have heard the story of how a demonstration was performed to show that a tiny cork could eventually move a heavy piece of steel. An eight-foot bar was suspended by a very strong wire. Nearby a small cork hanging by a fine silk thread was swung gently and rhythmically against the metal. At first the large object remained apparently motionless, but after being struck repeatedly for ten minutes, a slight variation could be observed. At the end of half an hour, the impact of the cork had transferred enough momentum to the bar to make it swing like a mighty

pendulum. A superficial observation would bring one to the conclusion that the cork could never move the iron bar. The scriptures tell us clearly, "God can take the weak things of the world to shame the strong, and the foolish things to shame the wise. He chose the lowly things, the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are. "Who knows but that you have come to such time as this?"

