

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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If You Keep Silent At This time Esther 4:14

We live in a pragmatic age – that which is conventional and relevant both as to the status quo and with respect to our own existences. The idea of tolerance permeates everything - from politics, education to religion. It embraces all of life. The idea that we should inoculate ourselves against the truth because the truth might offend someone is tantamount to moral cowardice. If we feel we should hide, then, at least, hide in the truth, but never hide behind a lie. The reality of pragmatism in our post-modern age means that everything is up for examination in the light of previous conventions, and if those conventions let us down, then by all means, we are told, you should embrace the new way of thinking and move forward.

It was really no different in the ancient kingdoms of long ago. It did not matter if you were a Joseph in Egypt, a Daniel in Babylon, a Nehemiah in Persia, or a Mordecai or Esther in Persia – the pressures were the same. Conform or perish! It was precisely because Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, Mordecai and Esther did not conform that they were proved to be the powerful godly influence they were.

The story of Esther is a story of good and evil. We feel the malevolence of the wicked Haman breathing down our necks as he hunted the Jews in the ancient world. We feel the moral courage and dignity of Mordecai who refused to cower in the face of opposition and threats. Our hearts race with fear and beat with joy as we read our way through this biblical account. The power of righteousness always triumphs over that of wickedness. A godly death does not do away with righteousness, but rather sustains it in its most powerful expression – the vindication of God. God always wins.

The book of Esther never mentions God once, yet we sense the presence of the divine gracious Sovereign of the universe molding and conforming all events for His divine end. There is an unspoken and unseen grandeur that we feel and identify with. It is that God is doing something in the midst of danger, trouble and possible extinction.

It is Mordecai who grasps the essence of biblical theology that God is always at work on behalf of His people. Why is this so? It is so because He has covenanted with them to be their God and they are His to be His people. It is Mordecai who is resolute in the face of threats of extinction. It is Mordecai who is vindicated by God as King Ahasuerus reads the Book of memorable deeds long into the night (Est.6:1).

The events of Esther occur after the 70 years of captivity have ended, and between the first return under Zerubbabel in 538 BC (Ezra 1- 6) and the return of Ezra 458 BC (Ezra 7 – 10). Ahasuerus ruled from 486 – 465 BC as king of Persia.

The book of Esther details the attempts by Haman to annihilate the Jewish people. This is no different than the account of Pharaoh's dealings with Israel in Egypt before the Exodus.

Haman is the villain intent on the Jews destruction. His pride and vanity are dealt a serious blow by the refusal of Mordecai to give him honor, and bow down to him, and so he determines to eliminate not only Mordecai but every single Jew in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. It is a daring plan. His malice and hatred are reminiscent of the Satan who would destroy the people of God.

Haman's antipathy is only heightened when Mordecai is promoted as the king's favorite (especially since the night before, Haman had built gallows to hang Mordecai on – see Est. 5:9 - 14), and he has to lead Mordecai through the streets of the city proclaiming in a loud voice that this was the person the king delighted to honor (Est. 6:10, 11). After Haman had done this, he is enraged to the point of mourning and shame and covers his head. Even his wife and friends, who had previously encouraged him to vent his anger by building a gallows for Mordecai, sense that the tide has turned against him (Est. 6:13).

The edict of Haman to destroy all the Jews prompts Mordecai into action – he mourns and instructs Esther to seek an audience with the king. The only person who can have any influence with the king is Esther. Esther had not revealed her nationality on the instructions of Mordecai (see Est. 2:10) who knew the danger she might be exposed to if others knew she was Jewish. The time for hiding is over. Unless drastic action is taken the results will be devastating for the Jews.

Esther seemed reluctant to go unannounced or uncalled into the king's presence as this could be a dangerous thing to do. Nobody entered the king's presence without his permission or without being called for, and Esther says that the king has not called for her in 30 days (Est. 4:11). She thinks she may be out of favor with the king.

Mordecai's response is one of those that lives on forever. He reminds Esther that she should not think that because she is the queen or because she dwells in the palace that she will be exempt from destruction and harm (Est. 4:13). Mordecai states that if she is silent at such a time as this, someone else will arise from somewhere else and get the honor (Est. 4:14) and Esther's family and name will lie forgotten.

Mordecai has an excellent understanding of the providence of God. He knows that God will never allow His people to be utterly destroyed because of God's promise to Abraham. He senses that he and Esther are living in calamitous times, in poignant times, in providential times that are all in the hand of God. God's timing strikes him as important. Mordecai recognizes the significance of the hour, and he pushes Esther to make a decision – *“who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this.”*

Surely every Christian should think like Mordecai. It is not easy to do so. It requires faith and trust in God. To live apart from the providential dealings of God in the sense that we don't think of them is a shame. Most of us understand God's providence retroactively (after it has happened), but this is only one aspect of looking at providence. Rather, God's fatherly concern and care for us in that He is always doing something for us is a present reality, and we should seek to live in the light of that reality.

This is where Mordecai wants Esther to be. Place yourself into the hands of God no matter the consequences. Pragmatism is all about the consequences. Pragmatism says that if the consequences are not good for you, then don't get involved. This is not what the book of Esther is about. Esther teaches us to engage in holy activity apart from and in spite of the consequences.

Our modern age does not like this nor does it advise it. In fact, neither does the Church advise it. I doubt that you will find any course in any seminary or church in the country that prepares someone for persecution. How do you prepare yourself for calamity and hardship? The first step is to live in holy anticipation of the gracious dealings of God everyday regardless of the consequences (either good or bad). The second step is to anticipate that everyday God will do and is doing something on your behalf. The third step is to be thankful for every occasion that occurs in your life. The final step is to live by trusting your life into the sovereign purposes of God. Such living destroys the emotional wrecks that we have become. Such living breeds confidence in God. Preoccupation with health, fitness and wealth will subside in the glories of God who will be seen as acting above and beyond what we can ever conceive of. The next time you want to be silent or are tempted to think that God does not concern Himself with you, then remember – *“who knows why you have to come in your situation to such a time as this.”*