

Sermon Title: For Just A Time As This

Our lives are not always to our liking: the places we live, the people we associate with, or the problems we encounter. These things may not always be our fault. We may be the victims of circumstances, or we may have made decisions, which we thought were right, but which has not worked out as we expected. There is a story in the Bible that will encourage those in adverse circumstances as these. This story has all the stuff of which best selling novels are made, drama, power, and romance, intrigue.

It's a most unusual Old Testament Book. It stands out among all the books of the Bible, as it is the only one in which God is not mentioned.

The man of the house was none other than the king of the greatest empire in the world of his day. King Ahasuerus, better known as Xerxes 1 of the Persian Empire in secular history. His powerful empire spread from India to Ethiopia. But, the real passion in his life was women.

The Word of God tells us "In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his princes, army officers, nobles of Persia, and displayed his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for 180 days." (Esther 1:3,4) Such a high-level conference, lasting six months, had to be more than just a big party. It was probably a

strategy session for Xerxes' forth-coming invasion of Greece.

Secular history tells us that he began that invasion not long after this magnificent convocation.

When he was a little tipsy from his wine, he called for his beautiful queen, Vasti, so he could show her off before his friends. She refuses to be made a public spectacle, and Ahasuerus was enraged. At the advice of his trusted counselors he decided to depose her by royal decree - the law of Persians could never be reversed, not even by the king himself. It was a rash decision, which he would live to regret, but Xerxes was known to be an impulsive and headstrong man. Besides that, he had more important things to do than to worry about his harem. He was ready to conquer Greece, something that his father Darius, had never been able to do. His armies were superior to theirs and the momentum of history was on his side. But in a succession of famous battles familiar to students of history (Salamis, Plataea), his military might was finally broken, and he returned to his capital in Susa a beaten man. How he must have longed for the comfort and companionship of his deposed queen to soothe him in his shame. "After these things when the anger of king Ahasuerus had subsided, he remember Vasti and his decree" 2:1 But it was too late. His decree was irreversible.

His aides suggested a Miss Persia beauty contest to find a queen for Him. (See 2:2-4.) All the eligible virgins are gathered from across the land and brought to the king's harem where they each had a chance to impress the king who would eventually choose one of them to be queen. This was kind of a "who wants to marry a millionaire king" sort of thing. The whole thing sounded like fun to the king, so he gave his permission, and the search was on. A beauty contest is not a bad way to find a wife, if looks are all you are looking for. But God was going to give Ahasuerus a great deal more than good looks, whether he wanted it or not.

Esther the local beauty, she "was lovely in form and features" 2:7 She was a lovely woman, and there was no way she could escape the clutches of the king's servant who was scouting the land for beautiful virgins.

She was brought to the palace together with others, to undergo a six-month course of beauty treatment.

When the king saw Esther he fell head and heels over her.(See 2:17)

Scripture never says that Esther wanted to marry Ahasuerus. It was a flattering offer, but she must have known that he would be less than an ideal husband. But how do you say "no" to a tyrannical monarch without losing your head? So it was that this simple Jewish girl became the queen of the Persian Empire. It was a rags to riches story unexcelled in human history. God's providential hand is clearly visible.

This Old Testament book of Esther is an exciting drama, woven around the conflict between two men. Modecai was a Jewish man of no particular note who once overheard two men planning the king's assassination. He told Esther, she told the king and the plot was put down. The plotters were arrested & hanged, and the faithful informer went back to Sitting in the Market. Esther rose even higher in the king's favor.

Haman, the other man-in the story was the king's drinking buddy. Cocky and boastful, Haman expected people to bow down when rode by. Wicked Prime Minister Haman cooked up a plan to punish Modecai for his refusal to bow in reverence and additionally to exterminate very living Jew in the Persian Empire. Being very superstitious and believing in astrology, he bade his magicians cast lots that he might find a lucky day for his great undertaking, God spun the dice to give the Jews, and Modecai and Esther in particular to prepare.

Esther 4

God placed his agents in fit places for doing his work. The Lord was not taken by surprise by this plot of Haman. He had foreseen it and forestalled it. God, in His Providence, placed His servants in positions where He can make use of them!

Haman built a huge gallows for Modecai and convinced the King to issue an order to exterminate the Jews. This Pagan king was not very smart, always listening to wrong advice. It was another hasty decision that Ahaseurus would live to regret.

The Jews wept at the news of the Kings order.

Neither Haman nor King Xexes knew that the queen was Jewish & related to Modecai. Modecai tells Queen Esther about the edict, and she was eventually determined to risk her life to try and save her people. The Persian court has a rule; no one could speak to the king unless bidden.

Before Esther approached the king. She prepares herself, dressed up, and sprayed herself with Channel. When the king saw her, He was pleased.

Two banquets later the extermination was effectively rescinded, Haman was hanged on his own gallows, and Modecai was elevated to a position of prominence.

Between Modecai and Esther they demonstrate:-
Expectancy- " If you remain silent at this time," Modecai said, "Relief and deliverance will arise from another place". Even if some might perish in the meantime, it never occurred to Modecai that God wouldn't do something to save his people and to stop the king's order.

Sense of destiny- A belief that God's hand was on their lives and guiding them. Mordecai's question to the Queen is the most famous quotation from the entire book: " Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Submission to God- These people fast and pray for three days before taking action. Clearly they wanted divine blessing as they launched their plan. Actions speak louder than words. Esther sent word to Mordecai asking for all the Jews in the land to fast for three days, while she and her maids did the same. She also planned how she would ask the King to spare the Jews, preparing banquets before she made her request. "God is not in the business of hiring smooth-talkers, but calling faithful servants,"

Willing to take a risk- Queen Esther knew that her plan to approach the king was dangerous, but she announced her decision to Mordecai: " I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

Conclusions

What can we learn by looking so far back into History when we live in a high-tech, rapidly changing age?

The world changes constantly, but remember God does not change. Sometimes he seems to be silent and far away but he has not withdrawn from the universe or left us on our own. He who created the world still sustains & watches over it. Nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight. He is aware of us as individuals. He knows our needs.

As God worked through Mordecai and Esther he can work through us today. And who knows, you may be where you are "for such a time as this."

No individual is left to drift uselessly through life. Some of us have such poor self-images and such a small view of God that we see no way in which could use us. We may believe that he intervened in history and in people's lives many years ago but doubt that he does that any longer. Often we don't expect God to lead, so we miss his direction.

Each of us is uniquely placed to make a difference for God in the lives of others.

What might God be asking you to do at your work place to contribute to the kingdom? Who are your neighbors? Why has God put them next to you and in what ways might you reach out to them with God's love and compassion? If you or someone in your family belongs to a club or community group, what might God want you to notice?

What has God in store for you to advance the cause of the kingdom? It can make a tremendous difference in the way you view the world and the people around you if you begin with the assumption that you are there for a reason, a purpose. It might not be as glamorous or specific as Esther's. But if we believe God is constantly at work in our lives and in the lives of others, then it is pretty likely that God has some way that we can be used effectively in service to the kingdom.

I don't know what the future holds. But I do know that God has a plan for our future, as individuals and as a church. Some of that will almost certainly involve risk. Esther risked her very life.

We can also learn from the pagan King. Throughout the book of Esther, he takes the advice of the last person to speak with him. He listens to Haman and to Esther and gives them equal credence. It is not until he sees Haman in what he interprets to be an inappropriate relationship with Esther that he orders him killed. Before that, each advisor is listened to and the Jews, and in fact everyone in the kingdom, are only as secure as the last suggestion given him.

Are we too much like Ahasuerus? Do we allow ourselves to be pushed and pulled by others or do we stand up proudly for what we believe to be our role in the world?

At one time the people of God seemed to be altogether in Haman's power. So is it with the Church of God today. The foes of the Truth of God can never put out the candle that God has lit. They can never crush the living seed that the Lord Jesus has sown in His own people. Do not afraid.

Purim is a festival that commemorates the deliverance of the Hebrews from the murderous plans of the wicked then and in subsequent generations. It celebrates God's deliverance from the adversary. So! Celebrate! Jesus has delivered us from our adversary. And in view of our recent studies in the end time recognize also how safe you, the Church of God will always be.