




For Such a Time as This



Esther Chapter 4

MORDECAI'S LAMENT (VERSES 1-3)

About ten years ago, I found myself in a state of heart-wrenching sorrow. I was in Ohio for a conference while my father, having been sick for a while, lay in a fragile state of health a thousand miles away.

His condition worsened, and with a heavy heart, my son reached out to me. "You better come home now," he said, "we don't have much time."

That night in my hotel room, I cried with a depth of sorrow I had never known before. As if every tear was a word unspoken, a memory unshared. Once the tears had fallen, once my grief had found its way out, I felt an unexpected calm. The next day, I returned home and was greeted by the sight of Dad's radiant smile—a warm, comforting beacon that dispelled the shadow of sorrow, if only for a while. He left us two days later, yet in the aftermath of his departure, I found that my tears had largely run their course.

Grief and love are two sides of one coin. We can't have one without being profoundly touched by the other. And yet, both have a beauty of their own, carving deep imprints upon our hearts.

I was reminded of that today as I read about Mordecai mourning in sackcloth and ashes. And, when I saw that he went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly, I recognized a profound lesson: mourning and grief should not be hidden away. Instead, they serve as a testament to our capacity to love and empathize. Ecclesiastes 3:4 reminds us, "There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

When I talk about embracing the ebb and flow of our emotions, I'm not talking about those who walk around viewing life as a glass half empty. I'm talking about acknowledging the depths of our sorrow and allowing ourselves to experience it.

Just as Mordecai's open display of grief called upon his community to collectively mourn, our shared vulnerability becomes a source of strength and resilience in the body of Christ. As we navigate the sorrowful depths of our grief together, we forge connections that strengthen our bond in the body of Christ.

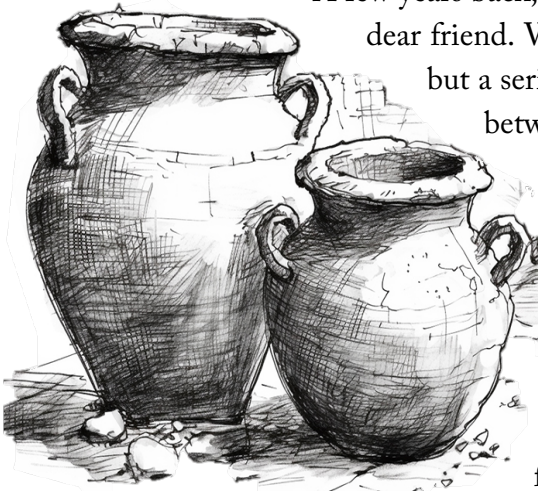
Did you know?

Mourning in ancient Jewish culture often involved wearing sackcloth, a coarse material usually made of goat's hair, and putting ashes on one's body. This was a public sign of one's inward grief and distress.

ESTHER'S DECISION (VERSES 4-17)

This chapter in particular has captivated my heart. The story of Esther, positioned "for such a time as this," resonates deeply within

me. It reminds me of a personal experience that echoes the theme of divine positioning, unexpected encounters, and stepping out of our comfort zones.



A few years back, I found myself estranged from a dear friend. We were inseparable at one time, but a series of small events drove a wedge between us. Over time, I wondered how she was doing, and what she was up to, but fear held me back from reaching out. The fear of rejection stifled any attempt at reconnecting.

Several years later, I took on a temporary job quite a distance from home. It was stressful in so many ways. Stepping out of my comfort zone to work with the public after years of familiarity with the home front, and feeling overwhelmed by the advancements in modern technology, was a daunting prospect. Every day that I got up for work, I felt nervous and uneasy about the long day ahead.

One day, as I was busy at work, I caught sight of my old friend. To my surprise, she was shopping in the same store, despite its distance from home. An awkward situation was the last thing I needed that day. I was afraid of rejection, of confrontation, and of further complicating an already delicate situation. The weight of uncertainty and the fear of a potential negative outcome weighed heavily on my heart. Little did I know that within that awkwardness lay the seeds of growth, healing, and God's unfolding plan.

With my heart racing and hands trembling, I mustered the courage to say hello. I didn't know if she'd accept me, I didn't know if she'd reject me. What I did know is that I had to put fear aside to

do the right thing. I knew that I had to step out of my comfort zone to step into God's will.

It's in the face of adversity, uncertainty, and fear that our courage shines brightest. When we confront challenges with unwavering hope and trust in God, when we choose faith over fear, that's when our bravery and courage are truly demonstrated. It is in those moments that we embrace the fullness of God's strength and walk boldly in His purpose for our lives.

It was a small step, but that simple act of courage became the catalyst for repairing our broken friendship. In an incredible turn of events, she returned to the store the next day and the day after that. I discovered that she had recently moved just across the street, and as my temporary position came to an end, a renewed friendship was just beginning.

Looking back at that time, I firmly believe that God positioned me in that job "for such a time as this." It was a departure from my comfort zone, an opportunity for growth and healing. And, even though I couldn't comprehend the purpose in the midst of all that stress, I learned to trust His providence and timing.

Did you know?

According to the ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, men with axes in their hands stood around the king's throne in order to punish anyone that approached him without being called.

Courage isn't the absence of fear; it's a willingness to follow God's will in spite of our fear. His plans often unfold in mysterious ways,

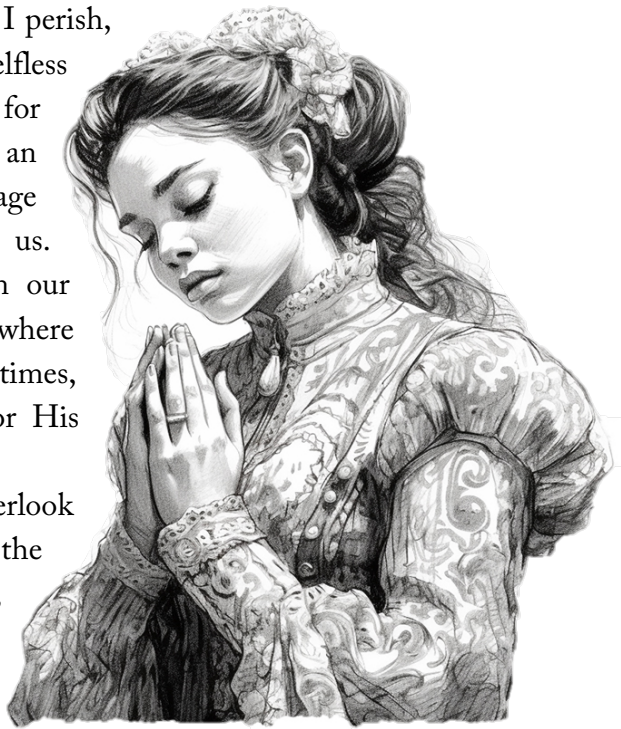
and sometimes, we only grasp their purpose in hindsight. In those moments of uncertainty, we're called to trust Him whole-heartedly, knowing that He works all things together for our good.

The profound meaning of Mordecai's statement, "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" lies in its highlighting of the divine purpose and timing of Esther's role as queen. He reminded her that her presence in the palace was not by chance, but rather for the purpose of glorifying God.

It's a call to embrace the unique circumstances and opportunities that God has placed before us. It reminds us that there is a divine purpose behind our positions and experiences, and that we have the capacity to make a significant difference in the lives of others. Mordecai's words invite us to consider the larger picture and recognize that our lives are not just a random sequence of events, but part of a greater narrative orchestrated by God.

Esther's brave words, "If I perish, I perish," encapsulate her selfless willingness to risk everything for the sake of her people. It's an inspiring example of courage and sacrifice for all of us. Remember, sweet friend, in our own lives, God has placed us where we are for a reason, and sometimes, He calls us to take risks for His kingdom.

Finally, let's not overlook Esther's call for a fast among the Jews. By initiating a fast, Esther demonstrated her deep reliance on God and her recognition of His



power to bring about deliverance. The act of fasting served as a tangible expression of her earnest desire for divine guidance, protection, and favor. It was a spiritual discipline that united the Jewish community, bringing them together in a collective pursuit of God's mercy and intervention.

Her call for a fast highlights the significance of seeking God wholeheartedly in times of crisis or difficulty. It reminds us of the power of prayer and self-discipline in deepening our relationship with God and aligning ourselves with His will.

How did the Jews react to the news?

Who was Hathak?

What instructions did Mordecai send to Esther?

What was Esther's initial response to Mordecai's request?

What was Mordecai's second message to Esther?

What was Esther's final reply?

How might Esther's three-day fast, during which she risked death but ultimately found favor with the king, reflect the death and resurrection of Jesus?

AS WE CLOSE THIS CHAPTER

Let's stop to consider these lessons. First, it's okay—even beneficial—to express our sorrow and grief openly. Second, God has positioned us "for such a time as this," and we should be ready to take risks for His kingdom, trusting in His plan. Finally, in times of crisis, let's remember to turn to God first, seeking His guidance through prayer and perhaps even fasting.

Esther Chapter 4

How did the Jews react to the news?

Upon hearing the news of the decree against the Jews, they reacted with mourning. There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:3).

Who was Hathak?

Hathak was one of Queen Esther's eunuchs assigned to her by the king. He served as a go-between for Esther and Mordecai during this crucial time (Esther 4:5).

What instructions did Mordecai send to Esther?

Mordecai sent instructions to Esther to approach the king and plead for mercy on behalf of her people (Esther 4:8).

What was Esther's initial response to Mordecai's request?

Esther's initial response to Mordecai's request was hesitance due to the law that anyone who approached the king uninvited could be put to death unless the king extended his gold scepter to spare their life (Esther 4:11).

What was Mordecai's second message to Esther?

Mordecai's second message to Esther stressed the seriousness of the situation. He pointed out that Esther's royal position wouldn't save her from the fate of her people and that relief and deliverance for the Jews would arise from another place if she remained silent. He also suggested that she might have become queen for "such a time as this" (Esther 4:13-14).

What was Esther's final reply?

Esther's final reply is a bold decision to approach the king despite the potential risk to her life. She requested Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa to fast on her behalf. Her famous words were, "And if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

How might Esther's three-day fast, during which she risked death but ultimately found favor with the king, reflect the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Esther's three-day fast, during which she risked death but ultimately found favor with the king, can reflect the death and resurrection of Jesus in several ways. Just as Esther was willing to risk her life to save her people, Jesus willingly gave His life to save humanity. Esther's three-day fast can also symbolically echo the three days Jesus spent in the tomb. The favor Esther found with the king after the fast is reminiscent of the victory of Christ's resurrection. The way Esther stood in the gap for her people reflects Jesus' role as our mediator with God. Lastly, the deliverance of the Jews following Esther's plea mirrors the spiritual deliverance available to all through Jesus' death and resurrection.