



For Such a Time as This

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The Lord is working His plan even when we cannot see Him.

Have you ever experienced a time when it seemed like God was absent? When it seemed His voice went quiet? When it felt like He had abandoned you or forgotten you in your moment of need? Have you ever been tempted to question God’s goodness in the face of tragedy, personal failure, or grief?

Just watching the news—witnessing innumerable cases of abuse, poverty, oppression, injustice, and hunger—we can start to wonder if God is still active and in control of our world. It can seem almost like God is hiding.



Voices from Church History

“Many women, fortified by the grace of God, have accomplished many heroic actions...[Esther] begged the all-seeing Master of the ages, and he, seeing the meekness of her soul, rescued the people for whose sake she had faced danger.”¹

—Clement of Rome (circa 30-100)



What kinds of events and tragedies are most likely to make you question God’s providential care over this world?



What circumstances have you faced that led to this kind of questioning?

In this session we look at the first part of Esther's story. From Esther we learn how to seek the Lord even during those seasons of life when His hand of providence seems to be hidden. We learn to see ourselves as playing a role in God's sovereign plan for the world, and we gain the courage to accept the risk of following God, no matter the cost. As God's people, we are to find and fulfill our purpose today—for such a time as this—a purpose that must align with God's greater plan to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

1. Seek the Lord even when it seems He is hidden (Esth. 4:1-7).

Esther was an orphan, raised by her cousin, Mordecai. In addition to her difficult family situation, Esther belonged to an immigrant family, which meant she was part of a religious, racial, and cultural minority. The dominant culture in Persia was so inhospitable to Jews that Mordecai felt the need to hide her cultural identity (Esth. 2:10). Esther knew what it meant to be an outsider.

Esther was taken from Mordecai as a young girl. Selected for her physical beauty, she was forced into a marriage with a violent and unstable man. Because Xerxes was the world's most powerful ruler and because of the age gap between bride and groom, the power differential in the relationship between Xerxes and Esther was substantial.

One of Xerxes' closest advisers, Haman, hated Mordecai and he hated the Jews. He disliked their ethnicity, their culture, and their religious beliefs. Haman convinced the king that the resistance of some Jews to full assimilation into Persian culture was a threat to the Persian way of life. So he used his proximity to the king to goad him into signing an edict that called for the extermination of the Jewish people throughout the Persian Empire. The date was set when the Persian military and citizenry would be mobilized to kill Jews in every city and province in the kingdom (Esth. 3:8-13). That's where we pick up the story:

¹ When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. ² He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷ and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people faced certain doom. There appeared to be no way out and no way to change their circumstances. They grieved and agonized for themselves and their people. Yet God had a plan, and they all had a part to play.

While neither prayers nor God are specifically mentioned, it is apparent that the people were humbling themselves before the Lord. Even though God must have seemed hard to find and hard to trust, Mordecai and many of his believing contemporaries were determined to seek after Him.



What are some indications that God's people were seeking Him, even though He seemed absent?



What is the significance of taking steps to seek God even when you feel abandoned?

Perhaps you too have found yourself overcome with grief or swamped by terrible circumstances. When we cannot see what God is doing, we may begin to question if He is paying attention. But He is there. Instead of dwelling on doubts and questions, we do well to reinforce our faith in His presence. We should take all of the little faith we have and call out to the great God we trust is there, even when He seems to be hidden.



Voices from Church History

“Where we cannot trace God’s hand, we can trust His heart.”²

—Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

In many ways the Book of Esther resembles our actual lives. We may find it hard to identify with the miraculous “God-encounters” of Abraham or Moses. We haven’t seen fire fall from the sky like Elijah. We haven’t killed a giant in battle like David. But many of us have felt marginalized and forgotten like Esther. Some of us have been abused and misused. Most of us have had our doubts about whether or not God was going to come through for us.

We live in a messed-up world, and many of us have messy lives. Esther shows us what it’s like to believe that in the midst of the chaotic, difficult, and overwhelming circumstances of life, we are not alone. God is there with power and a plan and a part for us to play.



In what ways is Esther’s story similar to that of many believers throughout the world?

2. Recognize the role you play in the sovereign plan of God (Esth. 4:8-14).

⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. ⁹ And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹ “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”

¹² And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³ Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

The arc of the story shows that Esther and Mordecai have not attained their positions of access to political power by accident. God put them there on purpose. But even though God had appointed and raised Esther up to be queen in the Persian Empire, she still had to make a personal choice to exercise faith and courage in order to fulfill her part in God’s plan.

This was her “defining moment” as an individual, and her choices carried massive consequences that extended far beyond what she could possibly imagine. Her life was at stake, but so also was the fate of Jewish people everywhere. Even more importantly, the possibility of the promised Messiah also hung in the balance. Mordecai pointed out the importance of the situation in verse 14 with a powerful challenge: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”



Who are some people throughout history whose life circumstances and position made it possible for them to change the world?



When have you felt like you were put somewhere “for such a time as this” to do God’s will?

Have you ever felt insignificant? Have you ever doubted that God could use you? It’s likely that Esther felt that way. But God had orchestrated the events of her life—even the sad and tragic and terrible moments—so that she would be in a position to make a difference for His sake.

The Bible indicates that God is doing the same in all of our lives. God is weaving the events of our lives—even the difficult and painful parts—to prepare us and position us for usefulness in His kingdom. Yet we still have to make real choices that really matter. And our decision to be obedient and faithful and to seize our defining moments can have a ripple effect and consequences far beyond what we can see or imagine.



What role do our past circumstances and our present position play in bringing God glory?



What are some of the aspects of your past that you’ve seen God use to make you more effective in serving Him?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

28. God’s Providence

Providence refers to God’s continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God’s preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Gen. 8:21-22). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God’s personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order but also the individuals and events within human history.

3. Accept the risk associated with your purpose (Esth. 4:15-17).

¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf; and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther risked it all for the sake of her people. Now, we’d like to think that God’s people always win. But if we choose to go all in with God—to follow Him no matter the cost—we have to acknowledge the possibility of real loss.

Like Esther, many of us have had tough experiences. Some have been touched by tragedy. Others have to live with the consequences of foolish choices. But God has a way of taking everything we are—our personalities, our experiences, our gifts and talents, our “baggage,” our hopes, our faith—and redeeming it all. Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead so that God could take broken people like us and make us useful for Him. We can know that nothing in our background or our present circumstances is outside of the sovereign power of God. He is always working, even when we can’t see him (Rom. 8:28).

While we trust God’s commitment to keep all of His promises, we still bear a responsibility to participate in His redemptive plan for this world and the people in it. Obedience matters. God *could* execute His purposes without our help, but He *won’t*. He chooses to use us to accomplish His plans (Eph. 2:10).

Faithfulness to God and His gospel might place us outside the mainstream and may even compel us to take huge risks. But the risks are worth it. We don’t have to worry, and we don’t have to fear. God is in control. We have a part to play. And we win in the end.



Voices from Church History

“We should every one of us consider, for what end God has put us in the place where we are? And when an opportunity offers of serving God and our generation, we must take care not to let it slip.”³

—John Wesley (1703-1791)



What are some examples of people taking risks to follow Christ?



When have you had to risk your own welfare in doing what God called you to do?

Conclusion

In the next session, we will pick up the story and see what happened to Esther and Mordecai. For now, we must stop and marvel at the beauty of this story. God, although not mentioned in this book, is the great Author who is weaving together this tale through the extraordinary lives of these people.

The same Author who tells this story is the One who later sent His Son in the fullness of time—“for such a time as this”—to lose His own life for the sake of the world.

The same Author who sent His Son now lives in you by His Spirit, and He is weaving all your past circumstances and your present position together to be part of His great plan of gathering people from every tribe, tongue, and nation around His throne, together in Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION: The command to kill all the Jews threatened the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Messiah-King who would bring the blessing of Abraham to the world. Even though His involvement in the story of Esther seems hidden, God was at work, creating and implementing a plan to rescue His people and set the stage for the coming of His Son.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to find and fulfill our purpose within His greater plan to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

1. How can we as a group encourage each other to seek the Lord when His hand of providence is hidden from our view?

2. How should the mind-set of “for such a time as this” affect your actions toward and conversations with others this week?

3. What are some ways we can risk and sacrifice for the sake of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in our community?
