

Esther 4:9-17 God's Sovereignty is the Strength of his People

Exegetical Big Idea: God has sovereignly prepared Esther for this moment. Her only choice is to trust God with her life and go to the king.

Homiletical Big Idea: **God will raise people up to accomplish his purposes, Let us not be found unprepared.**

Fallen Condition Focus: When we neglect the reality of God's sovereignty, it causes his people to be fearful and faithless.

Intro:

You know before Covid-19 hit, there were these things called sporting events. Are you old enough to remember them? I grew up in Ottawa and when I was a young teenager, they built a giant NHL stadium in my neighborhood. Being so close, I got to go to different hockey games and a concert and Billy Graham even held an event there. So now it's called the Canadian Tire centre, and it holds around 17,000 people when it's packed.

Well football stadiums in the States can hold many many times that number of people. They can hold 50,60, or even over 100,000 people. Of course with that many people you need something called the Jumbotron. The Jumbotron of course is the giant cube hanging in the middle of everything with 4 massive screens on all four sides. These screens will show what's going on in the game and ads and replays and all that kind of thing. They'll also point the cameras to the crowd from time to time, so that 100,000 people can see what a few people are doing. Usually they're wearing the team's jersey and dancing around, but on one occasion in one video I saw, they found a guy who was picking his nose. He wasn't paying attention, in his own little world, and thousands of people saw him caught off-guard.

How do we know that God isn't sovereignly preparing us for action? God most often than not uses people to accomplish his purposes, and normal people at that. God is sovereignly ordaining the circumstances in your life, how do you know that he's not preparing you for something? The question is, will we be caught unprepared, picking our noses, or will we recognize God's leading and obediently answer the call whatever that may be?

God will raise people up to accomplish his purposes, Let us not be found unprepared.

Mordecai asks Esther to help...

9-11 – Our Faith must exceed our Fear

As Mordecai outlines the problem and Esther can clearly see for herself the dire situation that the Jewish people are in, Mordecai drops the dreaded question: "Can you help?"

Mordecai knows what he's asking, Esther's response is that everybody knows what happens when you approach the king without invitation! That's how it works in the royal palace, the king calls you, you don't call the king. Anyone who is arrogant enough to think they deserve an audience with the king is taught a lesson. There's one exception of course, if the king extends the golden scepter. Which is just a way for the king to have the last word right? There's far from a guarantee that the king will do this. And as we already know, it totally depends on what mood the king is in that day.

It's suicide really.

Add to that the fact that Esther hasn't been called in a month! It's likely the king has moved on to other companions and no longer has any need to Esther. That is after all the only thing that she is good for according to the king.

So you can see why she says back to Mordecai "that's a horrible plan"

It would be better off for her if she could just lay low and wait this out and hope that she escapes the wrath of the king.

The only problem with that of course is that Mordecai points out the fact that she won't escape Haman's wrath just because she's the queen. So she's in a lose-lose situation. The reality is that she may lose her life either way!

How more of a fearful situation can you think of? But does this excuse Esther from taking action. No, it doesn't. Gideon was a man full of fear. Over and over again in his story we get told how fearful he is. And yet, when God whittled his army down to 300, and told him to attack a vast army that was likely more than 100,000, fearful as he was he ran down that hill and routed the Midianites. Eventually his faith outgrew his fear.

Do we believe that our God today is the same God that was victorious then? Whether we believe it or not, he is. God doesn't change. Let us be a church that asks God for faith. Like the disciples let's admit to God together "I do believe, help my unbelief!"

12-13 Our Very Identity in Christ Invites Conflict with Evil.

One scholar points out that she is the only person in this book with two names. Her Hebrew name is Hadassah, but it's her Persian name that we best know her by, which of course is Esther. So she has this choice, who am I?

Will she stand brave as one of God's people, or will she remain silent and cowardly succumb to pagan pressures? What we have here is nothing less than an identity crisis.

She could try and remain anonymous in the king's shadow and ride out the calamity. But by choosing this she would have to sit by and watch countless people die, knowing that she could have tried to save them. Or she could identify as one of the Lord's people, and do the right thing, knowing that she could lose her life anyways in the process.

By the very nature of being a Jew, she has a responsibility. The logic here is this: If she goes before the king, reveals that she herself is a Jew, and then pleads for her life and her people's lives, perhaps the king will realize that he has ordered the death of his own queen and retract his edict.

So what's it going to be Esther? Will you take up your identity as a Jew? Or will you try and hide in your pagan identity?

[I remember the 2007 Stanley Cup run well. I remember it because I had a sweet play-off beard. But also because I was living in Ottawa and the Ottawa Senators was my team. So it's the finals. Only two teams remain Ottawa and Anaheim. Game 5, Ottawa is down a few games and things aren't looking good. And they start to panic a bit. During one routine play, Chris Phillips has the puck behind the net and he's waiting for his teammates to get into position to take the puck up the ice. An Anaheim player skates behind the net to put pressure on Phillips to move before he's ready. So Phillips avoids him and handles the puck dangerously close to his own net and loses control and puts the puck in his own net. He scores on his own team. Now, why do I remember this? Why does this kind of thing make the highlight reel? Because that's exactly the kind of thing that's NOT supposed to happen! You put on the team's jersey and you take on the identity as one of the teammates. Now, he did it by accident obviously, but it's nonetheless true that when you belong to a sports team, you have a responsibility to act accordingly.]

What about us church? Where do we place our priorities? Where do we place our joys and hopes? What are the things that are most important in our lives?

Do we trust that God has given us everything we need and could possibly desire in being his sons and daughters? Do we trust that we have all things in being co-heirs with Christ? Do we trust that God is able to meet all of our needs? Do we trust that he will meet all of our needs, if not in this life then certainly in the next?

When called to be different than the world around us, when called to be salt and light to the world, and when called to stand for righteousness amidst a culture that worships sin, do we give reasons why it's not possible?

If you call yourself a Christian, you have put on that jersey. You have a responsibility to live according to God's laws and for his glory. There is no such thing as taking a middle ground. If you take on Christ as your identity, you invite conflict with evil.

I know it's not easy. Being God's people is rarely easy. Esther reminds us that the consequence of accepting her identity likely means death for her! But does that negate responsibility? Absolutely not.

GOSPEL:

The circumstances are different, but the question is the same for us today. Which will you decide? Will you count yourself among God's people and face the wrath of the world, or will you count yourself among the world's people and face the wrath of God?

When it boils down to it, there are only two options. Fast forward to Revelation where everyone in the world has one of two options. You can accept the mark of the beast and escape the beast's wrath, or you can accept the mark of the Lord and escape the Lord's wrath. Either way, there's going to be wrath! The question is, whose do you prefer?

Let me be clear, choosing to side with the world may grant you relief now and it may make your life easier now, but just as in Esther's case, deliverance will come for God's people according to his sovereign will, and his righteous judgement will be poured on those who chose to side with the world. Choosing the Christian life is not the promise of an easy life. On the contrary, it's harder. But the reward is eternal, as is God's wrath. Trust me, it is better for you to suffer whatever may come now for choosing

to be counted among God's people, than it is to suffer for all of eternity because you chose the fleeting comforts of this life.

I have been honest with you, and you have never heard me say that the Christian life is easy, but I have said countless times and I believe it with all my heart. The Christian life is worth it. It's worth it because it's the life God intends us to live, it's worth it because it has real purpose and meaning, and it's worth it, because it is eternal.

So count yourself among God's people today, pick up your cross and follow Jesus, because he alone leads to everlasting joy and life.

Verse 14 – God's sovereignty isn't an excuse to be lazy, it's our motivation for bravery.

This is by far the most well-known verse of the entire book. And probably for good reason. It intertwines two realities that are honestly hard to fathom. This verse shows us that the sovereignty of God is intertwined tightly the responsibility of man.

Mordecai is right, if she remains silent, then deliverance will come from somewhere else. Mordecai is dead on. Deliverance is going to come. God is not going to let his promises fall to the ground. God has decreed that he will always preserve his people.

God's purposes and plans can never be thwarted or changed even the smallest amount by anyone or anything, regardless of whether or not they seem to help him or hinder him.

Isaiah 49:9-10, Psalm 103:19, Daniel 4:35, Ephesians 1:11-12

The unshakable truth is that God has promised to sustain his people no matter what happens. No mighty king, or smallest child can change or thwart his plans. This ought to give us great hope church. Even though calamity may surround us, knowing that the Lord has ordained salvation for his people should let us sleep easy at night.

However, God's sovereignty is never an excuse to be lazy. In this same verse that Mordecai pronounces the sovereignty of God, he realizes our responsibility to that sovereignty. "And who knows, but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

God's sovereignty, rather than being an excuse to do nothing, is actually our motivation to be brave.

If God is for us, who can stand against us? Because when God commands his people to do something, in one sense, it's not even them who are doing it, it's God himself.

[Have you ever baked with the 3 year old? I have. On many occasions. The first step is that I'm usually brought a baking apron and told to put it on. My daughter will then go get her stool and bring it to the counter. Now, I have to be honest, there's not a whole lot that a 3 year old can truly do on her own when it comes to baking. Even mixing can turn into a giant mess unless I'm right there supervising. So when I ask my 3 year old if she wants to help daddy bake, you have to realize that "help" is in quotation marks. How much "help" does a 3 year old give? None. But how much joy does she get in being involved in the process? A ton.]

More often than not, God chooses to use actual people to accomplish his purposes. Why? Because he needs help? Nope. Because it glorifies him to allow his children experience the joy of obedience and dependence on him.

We often say to ourselves. But what if God doesn't use me in this situation? What if there is someone else better suited for the job? What if there is someone who is more able to do the things I am not able to do? But that's exactly the point!

What if God has brought you into this exact situation for the purpose of using exactly you? What if God has chosen you exactly because you are not able on your own to do it? What if God has brought you to a situation that you are not "suited for" for the exact purpose of displaying his greatness and glory through you, an earthen vessel?

In fact, this is often exactly the case. Paul writes to the Corinthian church

"God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things- and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, *so that no one may boast before him*"

You see? God routinely chooses the "worst person for the job" according to worldly standards to accomplish his tasks exactly because they are no way able to do it themselves, and everybody can see it. He does this to display his glory.

God's sovereignty isn't our excuse to be lazy, it's our motivation for bravery.

But maybe you are a Christian, and you, like Esther, have turned your back on your true identity. Maybe you are living among the pagans and have become so much like them that you are no longer distinguishable from them.

I can't help but see God's amazing mercy even in this situation for Esther. She's living like a pagan, and yet God gives her the opportunity to come back to him.

The reality is that there are a lot of Christians who do believe in Christ, but still look like pagans. That's one of the uncomfortable themes of this book we are forced to look at. God's people who are not acting like God's people. The good news is that God gives mercy.

If you're a Christian who knows that you have not been living in obedience to God. Maybe today God is calling you to take a good look at what Esther does here and he is calling you to turn back to God.

I don't know what's going on in your life, or heart right now. Maybe you have come here today and are at some kind of crossroads in your life, or maybe you're in an inner battle with your soul. I want to tell you, turn to God. And who knows, maybe God has brought you to your situation for such a time as this.

Trust in the sovereignty of God for bravery in obedience.

15-17 Bravery itself from the LORD

This next verse shows us an Esther that we haven't seen before. Before this verse she seems to be timid and just doing what others tell her to do. When she enters the contest, she either does so out of immorality or weakness to stand up for herself. She hides her Jewish Identity. She commits adultery with the king. She takes orders from Mordecai.

But now, all of a sudden, we get a whole new Esther. Look at what she does in verses 15-17: She stops taking orders from Mordecai and starts giving them. She bravely chooses to adopt her Jewish identity. She fasts which, although is not stated here by the author, is a sign of her trusting in God and not herself or anybody else. And she risks her life by going to the king and doing the right thing even though it's against the law!

Esther is brave here, she risks her life. Her chances would have been better probably to not go before the king, but she does out of sheer bravery, knowing that it may be her last day on earth. She literally says "If I perish, I perish"

What happened?

So where does this bravery all of a sudden come from? You can't come to any other logical conclusion than that it comes from God. It has to. Esther has not been brave this entire book and then all of a sudden she rises up in bravery, fasts for 3 days to seemingly plead to God for help, and boldly marches before the king.

[I am well aware of my low pain tolerance. I don't know if you've noticed the caterpillars over my eyes. I have big eyebrows. Well I'm a little embarrassed to admit it but I let Alana pluck them a bit before our wedding. If you've never done that, can I just tell you how painful that is? I mean in actuality in relation to other things that I hear are painful, like giving birth for example, it's probably lower than a 1 out of 10. But for me, it was excruciating.]

Have you ever watched a movie where someone is being tortured, or read about martyrs of the faith who underwent torture? You know what pops into my mind every time? The reality that I wouldn't be able to endure it. I know how weak I am.

My only hope, and I mean this sincerely, is that if I ever face a moment like that that God would give me bravery that I do not have. Paul tells Timothy "For God has not given us a Spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.

Two things can be true at the same time. It is true that we are to bravely take responsibility and act according to God's laws and morality, but it is also true that this bravery comes only from the Lord.

The narrator doesn't tell us of course that this bravery comes from the Lord, but we get exactly this sense by the fact that Esther tells Mordecai to call together all the Jews in Susa to fast for her. The only way this makes sense is if it's connected to calling out to God for help. Take God out of the picture and fasting makes no sense. This isn't a hunger strike or anything like that. Xerxes is not going to change his mind because he has subjects who are starving themselves. Not eating food doesn't magically fix unrelated things. No, this can't be anything other than crying out to God.

In Esther's case, as we'll see next week, God heard her and was gracious and spared her and used her to deliver his people, but for every Christian who has stood and been delivered by God, there have been countless more that have stood just as faithful and brave, and God allowed their life to be taken. But

know this, each one of them did their job, and each one of them will receive their reward in heaven. We don't determine the outcome, we are just called to stand in the Lord's strength. Does it always make sense to us? No. But ultimately, is even death able to pry us from God's grip? No! Her statement "if I perish, I perish" is a statement of trust in God's power even over death.

Last time I checked, Paul wrote in Romans 7 that neither life NOR death nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

That statement can only be true if there is real hope in the resurrection of Jesus.

God's people being firmly in his grip is fundamentally dependent on the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus has not beaten death, then we are not safe in God's hands. But Christ has been raised to life! And with that comes the promise that every soul that trusts in God for salvation through Christ will also be raised with him to eternal glory forever. And by this hope church, we can face and withstand any and all threats that face us, by God's power and for his glory.

Let us be people of bravery, people who are willing to take action and responsibility according to righteousness and God's Word. I want us to be prepared. One way or another, God is going to raise up people to accomplish his tasks for his glory. I want us to be among them.