

Esther: For Such A Time As This

Esther

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Let's turn again to the second passage of Scripture we read, the book of Esther 4:13.

13 And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews.
14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

At the close of verse 16, the very last sentence, Esther replies,

16 "And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

These are two great texts and in a way it's hard to say which one we should take as the leading text for our consideration, but they both belong together anyway. One is a challenge that comes from Mordecai to Esther and he's led to issue that challenge by God; the other is a reply that Esther gives to that challenge and she, too, is led to that reply by God because they are both spiritual people, Mordecai and Esther, and they know each other well and they know that they have both been led by the Lord in the conclusions they come to. The fact of the matter is, that it isn't just Esther who has been raised to where she has been raised by God for such a time as this, it's also the case that Mordecai himself has been raised by God where he is for such a time as this. Here they both speak spiritually; they both speak courageously and we see that God is very much at work in their hearts.

Now, just to root this a little more obviously in the context, we saw in the morning how Mordecai and indeed all the Jews in all the provinces of Persia took this matter to God in prayer. They took it in earnest prayer with fasting and they weren't just wanting God to help them and, if necessary, to help them to die well, they were asking God for guidance and asking him for his intervention to show them what they were to do. Now, if we seek God like that and we were thinking about that, actually, just a couple of Sabbaths ago in connection with the woman who was wanting justice from the unjust judge and Christ

used that parable to encourage yourselves to keep asking God until God actually answers because God always will answer even if the answer is not necessarily what we expect. Like this, when they seek out God in this way with earnest prayer and fasting, God is bound to answer. We saw that in the morning in Isaiah 58. God was rebuking a fast and a false spirit; a fast that had no real prayer in it and a fast that had no spirituality and a fast that had no repentance and God told them to turn from that kind of empty, meaningless, ritualistic fasting to accompany that fasting with prayer, or to accompany their prayer with fasting, and with repentance. He said, "Then, when that happens, you shall call and the Lord will answer. You will ask for me and I will say, 'Here I Am.'" So when his people turn to him like this, we can expect God to answer and God does answer and he gives them the guidance that they're looking for.

Now, it's a great promise in Scripture that God will guide his people. It's a promise that we need to lay hold of. He will guide us. He guides us as he guides them, he guides them by his word and you'll notice that he confirms his word by providence and by wise Christian counsel. That's what we always need to remember ourselves, that God will guide us by his word and he will guide us by wise Christian counsel. Now, sometimes it's not perhaps easy to know when the word is guiding us or how the word guides us. It's certainly very easy when the commandment is explicit as something to do with, "Thou shalt not kill," or something of that kind, something that is manifest, something that is plain. We are not to murder and it's not difficult to work that out so if there's a case in point we simply apply it, but there are many other instances in life where decisions are important but we're not quite sure what the word of God is saying but, nonetheless, the promise remains true that God will guide us in his word and he will confirm that by providence and also through wise Christian counsel. That's not the same thing as the opinions of many professing Christian people. You can have the opinions of many professing Christian people which may just be plain wrong, but wise Christian counsel is a different matter and it's always good for us to surround ourselves with wise Christian counselors.

Now, let's look at this in the experience of both Mordecai and Esther. Let's take the guidance on Mordecai first of all. Now probably, I think it may be fair to say that he is an old man at this time and it may probably be the case that there is no more experienced believer than himself, but we understand the way he thinks from the words that he speaks to Esther in the words of our text. He says to her in verse 13, "Don't think in your heart that you'll escape where you are in the king's palace for if you remain completely silent, at this time relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" These are great words. We'll think about them in detail a little later but just a couple of things strike us right away. First of all, Mordecai has a deep rooted confidence in God's purpose standing. He knows that God's purpose will stand and that God will keep and will preserve his people and that his cause can't fail. Now, that doesn't mean that some people won't die. It doesn't even necessarily mean that many people won't die. Some may die, many may die, but Mordecai knows that even if a battle is lost and even if it's a big significant battle, Mordecai knows that the war is won. He knows that the people of God will survive and he also knows that the truth of God

will prevail in its purity, one day to such an extent that the glory of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Now, it's important for us to know the same truths and to apply them constantly in our hearts. We've been looking at some of these things in the prayer meeting recently, how important it is to trust God's sovereignty; to rejoice in God's sovereignty; his unchangeable purpose; and his unchangeable love towards ourselves. That's why it's important all the time to take the long view of things. If you take a short view of anything and if you look at any crisis, sometimes you're liable to be overwhelmed by it. Sometimes if you belong to the Reformed faith, as I hope you do, you're liable to count heads even all over the world and your head to become discouraged and to droop if you count congregations or the size of congregations, but we're not allowed to think that way. If we believe the Bible, if we believe the view of it that has been handed down in our own Reformed heritage, we don't believe the world is winding down. We're not waiting for it to be consumed at any time with fire from heaven. We're not waiting for that, we're waiting for something different from that. We pray, "Thy kingdom come." We pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." We are praying for the kings of the earth to come and to bring the riches of the resources of their kingdoms and to lay them in tribute at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. We look to Tarshish and the isles to come to the Lord. We're looking for the people of Ethiopia to stretch out their hands as Ethiopia is said to call upon the name of God. We're looking for the Egyptians and the Assyrians to come into the kingdom as the word prophesied.

That's what we're looking for. We don't think God is finished. He is far from finished with this world. Read the Psalms. It's interesting that the book of praise that God has given us is imbued with optimism. It's impossible to sing it spiritually and intelligently without rolling up your sleeves and getting on with the work that there is still to be done because God isn't finished and Mordecai knew that God was not finished. He knew that God's people would be preserved. Even in a remnant, they were preserved, but that remnant would grow and that remnant would flourish. One day the Messiah would be born from that remnant and through his glorious kingship, all the families of the earth, as was promised to Abraham, would come and kneel before him. So how can he be depressed about the situation? How can he come before God in prayer as someone who doesn't know what's going to happen when he knows what's going to happen? So he has that and we have that too.

The great doctrines that we believe in will revive yet. They will revive in Scotland yet. They will revive in this country. They will revive throughout the world. The purity of worship as we practice it that was once practiced across more or less the whole of the Reformation church and which is now nearly obliterated, it will revive yet. We don't count heads. If I was going to count heads, I'd count them as though at the time of the Reformation. There is no point saying to me, "Well, there are not many people now throughout the world who worship as we do." That's very true but if you go back 400 years ago, there weren't many people in the world who worshiped as other people do now. This things rise and fall and you need to accept that they will rise and fall and they'll give us grief when they fall, but we believe they'll rise again because we look for a better

day and we believe in a better day because that's what the word of God has promised. We're not what people call pessi-millennialists, we are opti-millennialists because God has a lot to do and Mordecai believed that too. My point is: in the new covenant, you must believe it as well. We must believe it as well. It's not just Mordecai that had the right to believe that God wasn't finished and that God would preserve his people, we too have the right to believe that and that he will make a little one to become a thousand. That Jacob will rise again even if he's small and the church of God shall so prevail that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

The second thing Mordecai believes is that along with the temptation, God will make a way of escape that they might be able to bear it. When God sends a catastrophe like this, there is a purpose for it. When God allows iniquity to come in like a flood, it's so that the standard of the Gospel can be clearly unfurled and there's a call to himself and a call to Esther. There may have been a time for hiding and it was understandable to hide and, in fact, I excused their hiding simply because of the persecution, and I'm not going to go over that ground. But the time for that was finished and he knows that if God is going to help them, he is going to use a way of escape that involves themselves. We're never to expect a miracle; we're never to expect dramatic interventions that allow ourselves to do nothing. Mordecai is not allowed to think that it's enough just to sit and to pray. He's not allowed to think that it's enough for Esther just to be queen. That she has nothing to do as queen; that she has nothing to venture. No, he knows that God's plan and purpose involves the acts of service and obedience of his own people. He knows that so there is something for himself to do that involves prayer and obedience and he knows from past experience that if he rises to the challenge and if she rises to the challenge and others rise to the challenge, that God will work deliverance. So God doesn't just preserve and protect his own work, but he uses his own people to preserve and protect his own work and that's extremely important. There will be many situations, probably some critical ones in your own life, when you know God needs people to do something. I say that reverently. I know fine and well that God needs none of us. I know that, but in the sense in which I mean it, when God needs or desires or calls you to do something, we must do it. We must do it and Mordecai knows that principle.

He also knows the principle that God's deliverances involve using the foolish things of this world to confound the wise. How often Mordecai had seen that in the history of God and his people. In the tents of Amram and Jochebed, a little child is born, the youngest of the family who will be a means of delivering the people of God. But that infant, in his weakness and helplessness, is first cast onto the raging, swelling Nile where he threatens to be devoured and to be lost but out of that foolishness and out of that cradle of death, out of that coffin sailing down the Nile, God will bring deliverance for his people. He will use that child. Again, well, the examples are so many, who would have thought that a young man from the obscure tribe of Dan would, wielding the jawbone of an ass, be able to hit a thousand Philistines on their heads and be the means of ending Philistine dominion over Israel? The foolish things. The jawbone of a donkey in the hand of a young man from Dan. Who would have thought that the youngest man from the least family in the tribe of Manasseh would be the person that God would use to overthrow the rule of the Ammonites? Who would believe that a young shepherd boy in Bethlehem, the

youngest of eight, would be the means of leading Israel to glory? Who would have thought that obscure fishermen from Galilee and Bethsaida would write Scriptures? Who would have thought that they would perform miracles and raise the dead and preach the Gospel?

But God has always chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and we all need to remember that. We mustn't measure things as the world measures them. We mustn't measure our own strength as a people or as a church in the way in which the world measures it. God can do anything with faith like a grain of mustard seed. However small it may be, if it's got fire in it, if it's got life in it, if it has reality and substance, then God is able to accomplish anything through that. All that is needed is that we be brought low; that we humble ourselves; that we learn the disciplines of prayer and fasting and that we learn to accompany it with acts of obedience before God. With that, all things are possible. All things are possible.

So, these principles undergird Mordecai's prayers and petitions all the time. "You, Lord, will perfect and protect your cause. You will make a way of escape from the enemy and you will use the weakest vessels to accomplish these things." Then he prays and he says, "God, guide me. I know these things now, God, guide me. Show me what I am to do or who is to do what at such a time as this," and he looks around at providence. And it's only then that you can look at providence. It's only an exercise to Christians that can read providences. Christians who aren't praying or who aren't in the way of God and disobedient Christians can forget looking at providence. I've seen people argue from providences in a way that is really quite remarkable and you can glean anything from providence. Anything at all. It's like the Delphi oracle; it can mean anything to the person who is looking at it. You've got to give it its rightful place. Give it its place, but give it its rightful place. You can only begin to look at it when you are prayerfully exercised before God; when you're in your right place spiritually and you are an obedient, prayerful person. But then, yes, providence can be read.

As Mordecai looks at it, there is one stark fact that stares at him in providence as there very often is when God brings matters to a head, and that's the exaltation of his cousin from nowhere to be the queen. You know, there's a marvelous verse in the Old Testament in connection with prayer which says this, "Before they call, I will answer." Have you ever had that experience in your prayer? "Before they call, I will answer." There are some marvelous instances of things like that. For example, when Daniel prays in chapter 9 of his prophecy, we're told that before he had finished the prayer, that God had sent the angel Gabriel with a revelation to give to Daniel but even that's strictly speaking, "While they call, I answer." But in the text I'm referring to it's, "Before they call, I will answer," and what that means simply is this: that God puts providences in place which are answering the thing that you are just about to ask. It's God's way of saying, "I know. I know. I know what you're asking for. It's me who even makes you ask it. Even the desire to ask it is from me and I know and I have already put the wheels in motion. I've already moved the pieces on the board exactly where I want them to be." And Mordecai can't but wonder at the fact that the rise of this monstrous evil in the person of Haman and the aggression, the naked aggression against God and against his Son, the rebellion that has

come out in Persia, that has been somehow forestalled by this woman, this young, beautiful Jewish woman, Hadassah, being put in place as the queen of Persia. These two things have come together and surely it is not without cause.

We see it and if you're looking, you'll find a providence that speaks to you too. Sometimes when we're down in our minds, we fail to see providences. Sometimes when, like the Psalmist, we refuse to be comforted, we fail to hear his voice actually as it is in Scripture and we fail to discern it in providence. You know, it's not a good condition to be in when your soul is refusing to be comforted. I didn't intend to bring that up tonight actually, and maybe there's a reason for that. Are you in that condition yourself? I have been there before myself. It's not a good situation to be in when your soul refuses to be comforted. It's as though God is ministering to you but you don't want that. It's wallowing in it. Wallowing in it. It's not good. Not good at all and when you're like that, you can't receive and you can't hear, but when God brings you to a better place and when you start coming to God in a proper repentant spirit, you begin to see providence speak and it's a marvelous thing when providence speaks and when you're able to hear the voice of God in it and when you're able to receive the guidance of God in it.

Here, Mordecai knows what he has to do, or rather what his cousin has got to do. Now, that doesn't mean that it's a case of, "Well, I'm glad it doesn't involve anything for me. It involves something for my cousin." It's not as simple as that. For Esther to approach the king means, obviously, that she must reveal who she is. Her own cover is blown. That's over. It ordinarily speaking would be death for her and death for himself too. It would seem that the course of action that the Spirit impresses upon them is one that would ordinarily mean death for him and death for her. And don't think her death is a small thing for him. Mordecai loves his cousin deeply and spiritually, just as she loves him and just in these marvelous little ways in Scripture where incidental things are thrown in, we just find that. For example, the little verse that tells us after she became queen that she was obedient to Mordecai as she had been when she was a little girl. Just marvelous little things that tell us the spiritual love that existed between these two people. A love that existed when he adopted her in the first place and took her in to look after her, and a love that was reciprocated by her.

A beautiful Christian love and it was no easy matter for Mordecai to say, "Esther, you know this? It's falling to you. It's falling to you and you must take your life in your hands and you must go into the king." And don't think, too, that Mordecai didn't have the temptation just to leave it all be. He could take a fatalistic kind of hyper-Calvinistic view of all this and say, "Well, can't do anything about this. We've just got to leave it to God. God's in control so let him do all the work." But that's not the way it is, is it? We're not robots. We are laborers with God and we have a part to play and if there is something to be done and if something can be done, then we must be the ones to do it. We're still like and imagine the serpent saying to him, "Well, why not just take a chance in this? After all, maybe the king just will spare Esther and maybe he'll spare you too? Maybe you can be saved under Esther's wing. Maybe the rest can be destroyed but there's a chance for you because you're Esther's cousin so just hang onto Esther's coattails and if she's okay, maybe you can be okay too." Now, I'll tell you something: if Mordecai just loved himself

and if Mordecai was just looking after himself as many people do and sometimes sadly you feel many people in the church do, just looking after themselves, then he might well have gone that way. He might well have gone that way and they might have lived but he would have lost his soul, would he not? I'll come to that later because it's always possible to disobey and the consequences of disobedience that come.

No, Mordecai knows what's to be done and he tells Esther that she's got to go in to see the king and once he is resolved in that course of action and he knows that that's what God is saying, he's as bold as a lion in saying it. It may have taken him a wee while perhaps to know that this was what was to be done, but once he knows, he will do it. A wise Christian will be like that. A wise Christian will think and play and reflect and will bring things to the light of the Scriptures, but once the will of God is plain, it will be done and that's the way that he was and he speaks it to her once in verse 8, "You must go in to see the king," then when there's a slight hesitation perhaps from Esther when she says, "There are problems connected with that," he comes out with that marvelous speech that we read in the text, "Don't think you'll escape. If you remain silent, relief and deliverance will come from another place but you and your father's house will perish."

What a great speech it actually is. You know, it's only a couple of verses but you can feel the passion coming from it. You can feel the power in these verses. You can feel the conviction. You can feel the anointing of a man who has been with God; a man who knows God. A man who prays and a man who fasts and the words just carry that stamp of genuineness and power. They even come to us like that across the chasm of two and half thousand years; they still come to us like that. You can't read them without being moved. There are great speeches in the history of the world and our own nation has produced people who have made them, preeminently Churchill and people of that kind, and just in a few words they seem to convey so much and they convey it so powerfully in a way that is full of pathos or full of something. Sometimes it's almost mysterious and these words are like that. You can just feel them, "Don't think in your heart that you'll escape in the king's palace anymore than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent," notice how personal it all is, "relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" "Esther, whatever you do, God will do his part alright: relief and deliverance will come. Yes, it will, because God is not finished but God is calling you, Esther, to play your part in it. Think, Esther, about why you are where you are. You've now been five years married to a man that you never wanted to marry. You have found yourself sitting beside the man who is the most powerful man politically and economically in the whole world. Why, Esther, do you think when you've been a young woman of God, when you perhaps had a very different future planned out for yourself, why has God allowed this? Why has God placed you here? Is it not for such a time as this?"

Could Esther have been tempted through the years to think that it's just her destiny to be queen? Is she just to be queen for herself? We can easily be tempted to think like that; to use any position that God puts us into as though it was for our own glory, for the furtherance of our own name, for the furtherance of our own cause. Can a minister begin

to misuse his office for his own fame and his own advancement? Can an elder begin just to lord it over the people and to think that that is his duty to be in a place simply of authority? Are you in any position that God has given you there to serve or are you there for your prestige? Are you there for your comfort? Or are you there for your own obedience? "Why are you queen, Esther? Is it really lawful for you to protect yourself and to protect your queenship, irrespective of what it may cost others?" And sometimes God calls you to something that puts everything you've worked for at risk and are you willing to lay that on the altar? Having risen up, perhaps you enjoy it and you once thought that if you were to be raised, oh, you'd be raised for the glory of God. But having been raised and having tasted the power, the intoxication of the Persian court, the sheer sensuality of it pressing in at all sides, maybe that's something to be grasped onto and suddenly it's not so easy to humble yourself and to make yourself of no reputation for the advancement of the kingdom and for the glory of God. Has becoming a queen become everything for you or are you still willing to be just a Christian for God?

The fact is that there was a time for silence for Esther but that time has now gone and Mordecai highlights the fact that if she fails, her failure will not go unpunished. Notice that: her failure will not go unpunished. Not only is Mordecai convinced that if she stays silent God will use somebody else but he says, "Don't think in your heart that you're going to escape in the king's palace," and he says in verse 14, "You and your father's house will perish. Esther," he says, "if you step outside of God's will, you're going to lose that kind of protection. Your position isn't going to be a preservative for you. You'll be caught up in the evil decree just as much as everyone else and God will chastise you and he'll chastise your father's house."

Very often God acts like that with Christians in the church today. There is a duty expected of you. God calls you to something and it may cost you a little bit and you decide, "No, I can't afford that cost." What happens? What happens when we step outside the will of God? And please don't come in here with issues about divine foreordination and our free will and can we ever be outside the will of God and things like that. Leave that to the side. That's a philosophical question that has its own clear answer. The fact of the matter is that you can step outside the will of God. Of course you can. You can step outside the revealed will of God. You can be simply disobedient. I know in the higher sense that God allows that in his purpose, but you're stepping outside the will of God and what happens when you do that? Well, normally what happens is that God sets you aside and doesn't use you. He doesn't use you. You lose, what do you lose? You lose your power. You lose your power. You can retain your position, maybe even you can retain some kind of political influence that you covet. You can retain a community influence. You can retain a whole host of things but you lose your power and you lose your spirituality. You lose a lot. You lost what matters the most and you become a ghost of your former self. A ghost because you started to grasp something that you ought not to have grasped at all.

Believe me, there's an alternative universe in which Esther could have failed, in which Esther would not lay hold of her duty. And no, God won't be stuck. God is never stuck. When the disciples and the children in the temple were praising Christ and calling him

Messiah from Psalm 118, the Pharisees said, "Tell them to be quiet!" and Jesus said, "If they were to be quiet, even the stones themselves would cry out," because God is not stuck for witnesses. God is not stuck for people to praise himself. God is not stuck for helpers. God is not stuck for workers and if I gave the sense earlier on at all that God needs you or me, it's only in this relative sense. God doesn't need any of us. If I'm not playing my part, he'll just shift me to the side and he'll put someone else in my place, someone with faithfulness and with obedience and with power. And you know the Christian church today, if I'm not mistaken in our sad Western world and in our sad nations, is full of people that God has just moved aside. Moved aside. People who are ghosts of their former selves and they've been moved off. There is no vitality. There is no power. There is no spiritual dynamism because they have stepped outside the will of God and if you're a Christian here with any sense, if you have any sense, you should fear that more than anything. You should fear more than anything finding yourself in a place where you've become so used to persistent disobedience and faithlessness and never stepping out for God and never speaking on God's behalf and never being obedient in the teeth of a gale, so used to that that God just ceases to use you. He ceases to use you.

Every time duty calls, every time duty calls upon you, remember this verse. Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? And I'm saying that to you because it's easy to take a verse like this, to attach it to big people and big situations and, in a way, that's fair enough because that's where it originates. It originates with a woman who is in a big situation and with a big decision to make, but it would be foolish to confine it to that because the fact of the matter is that anytime we are called upon to face a duty and responsibility, we have come to the kingdom for such a time as this because every time there's a choice to be made, the choice is to be made for God. Always for God and always for the glory of God.

So, for Esther, it wasn't simply a matter of providence because she's got to reckon with that absolutely so that, "You, Lord, put me where I never thought I would be." She can't get away from that, alright. And as for what that means, I'm sure every fiber of her being would say, "Just be quiet, Esther. Just stay quiet," and a wise old Christian who happens to be her cousin comes to her and says, "Do you know what, Esther? It's on you. You've got to speak to the king. You've got to take your life in your hands in doing that." A man of God who speaks out of love for God and who doesn't speak out of self-interest. That's the kind of person that Mordecai is and when that person comes to you, listen.

I mentioned to you earlier, the Bible certainly says that in the multitude of counselors there is safety and that's true. In the multitudes of counselors there is safety, that's what the book of Proverbs tells us and sometimes when you've got a difficult decision to make, speak, but you don't just count heads when you speak. Some people's opinion weighs more than others. Always get the opinion of those who know how to pray and those who know how to fast. Get the opinion of those who aren't looking for what's good for themselves or even what's good for you but who take an objective look at things; who look at things from God's point of view, shall we say. And you'll know. You'll know them by their bearing. You'll know them by their dignity. You'll know them by their

words. You'll know them by their fruits. You'll know them by the sheer quality of what they have to say.

And Esther can't listen to her cousin and say, "You've got your own interests at heart." I mean, you can't even read these words and say that Mordecai's own interest is at heart. Mordecai is burning with a passion for God and his cause. She knows that. And sometimes we're confronted with the will of God like that and we just know what's right and we have to do it too. It's a beautiful thing, you know, when two spiritual people are communicating like this. It's a beautiful thing. They respect each other. They know each other. They have prayed together often and they know the voice of God.

She goes back and she thinks and we don't know exactly how long she thinks. The time frame isn't given to us here. One thing we know is that everything is out in the open. Certainly, the eunuch who has been conveying the message, although he's very close to her obviously, certainly he knows the secret. In fact, it's very plain that the maids know the secret. She said, "My maids will fast and will pray with me." By the way, I don't think, although maybe that's to come later, I'm not really sure, but I don't think we're to think of that as just an exercise in authority on Esther's part as much as to say, "I'm going to pray and I'm going to make my maids pray." These maids must have been maids who have come under Esther's influence and gradually Esther has found a way to open out regarding the things of God to those that she can carefully confide in. She hasn't cast her pearls before swine, but being in the way, God has given her an opportunity and I honestly think that there are very few situations in life where God doesn't give us an opportunity to share and to speak with others. I've no doubt, too, that if we clam up and cease to speak for the wrong reasons, these opportunities dry up and our ability to use them dry up but Esther was never in that position. She was always ready but her situation was hard but little by little she got there. She could confide in her maids; her maids would pray with her and her maids would fast with her.

Esther would attach no value to that being done in an unspiritual way so there must have been some kind of life there, but she thinks and she prays and she sends a message back to Mordecai which is just as immortal as the challenge Mordecai issued to her. She says, "My maids and I will fast." Actually, she says more than this but we'll see this next time. "Gather the Jews in Shushan. Fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, day or night. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" These are great words. They are great words. We could imagine that if she was in our Lord's day, walking the earth when he walked the earth, that he would say to her what he said to the Syro-Phoenician woman, "Oh woman, great is thy faith."

She's not just a child of Abraham, she's a daughter of Sarah. She's a woman of strength and of spiritual courage. She knows it's better to die in obedience and sacrifice than to live on in disobedience and spiritual selfishness. She knows it's better to go down honorably than to stay up in utter disgrace and at this point she has revealed to us, not as the queen of Persia, but as Hadassah, the young Jewish girl who is fragrant before God because that's what her name means, fragrance. Interestingly, in God's providence the

name Esther that is given to her mean "a star," and she shines with all the brightness of a star in the firmament of God's saints because at a critical point, she takes her life in her hands and she loves not her life unto death but she's willing to yield herself, if need be a sacrifice, anything that can be done in order to save the people of God.

Sometimes our lives can be defined by one thing. Sometimes one or two things. Most of us will find that our Christian life consists in a series of mundane things that are fairly unimportant from one point of view but important from another. I remember a Christian who I wouldn't always read, to be honest, but most people can say something good sometimes but he said that our Christian life largely consists in being able to do ordinary things often and to the glory of God and how true is that. How true is that. Our Christian life consists in doing ordinary things to the glory of God: managing our time; dealing well with our colleagues; being kind and respectful; raising up our children; being proper husbands or being proper wives. But there will be times that will define you and will define me, too, for good or ill and this has defined her and it has left her legacy to us, just someone who is willing to die. Someone who is willing just to put themselves out for others. Our Lord said that unless we take up our cross, we're not worthy of him. If we can't confess him before me, we're not worthy of him. These are cutting words. These are searching words. Can we confess him? Can we follow him? Are we willing to take a stand like Esther when she took the stand?

Now, there are difficulties in her way. It's one thing to know what God wants us to do, it's another thing to actually do it and, God willing, next time we'll look at the difficulties in her way and how she meets them and how she actually does the will of God. But we leave her for now as a woman who has resolved that, "If I perish, I perish!" And a woman who goes away with her closest friends to pray and to fast. That's the spirit, friends, that undoubtedly we need in our own churches in our own day. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had it, didn't they? When they were condemned to the burning fiery furnace, they said, "God is able to deliver us out of this, but if he doesn't, we're not going to fall down in front of your image." Isn't that wonderful? God is able to deliver us out of this, but if he doesn't, we're not going to fall down before your image. That is the spirit of living consecrated Christianity.

Let's close by singing to the praise of God in Psalm 79, page 332, verse 8 at the top of the page. Page 332, Psalm 79:8,

"Against us, mind not former sins.
Thy tender mercies show,
Let them prevent us, (and remember that the word "prevent" here means "let them go before us,") speedily,
For we are brought very low.

"For thy name's glory, help us, Lord. (Notice the reason there, "For thy name's glory, help us, Lord,)
Who hast our Savior been.
Deliver us for thy name's sake,

O purge away our sin.

"Why say the heathen, Where is their God?
Let him to them be known,
When those who shed thy servant's blood,
Are on our side overthrown.

"O, let the prisoner's sighs ascend,
Before they sight on high,
Preserve those in thy mighty power,
That are designed to die."

These four stanzas to the praise of God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest on and remain with you now and forevermore. Amen.