

LIVING AS GOD'S PEOPLE
ESTHER 4:4-17
Ps. Sam Beck

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone, my name is Sam and I am the pastor of HMCC Detroit. I've been in Detroit for about 7 years now and I live here with my wife Sunghyun and our two year old Caleb. We are thankful for God's grace, love, and power as he's been leading our church to make disciples among those who are socially overlooked, and it's my honor to share God's word with you today.

Scripture Introduction

Please join me in Esther 4:4-17 for today's message, which is titled "Living Out God's Purposes".

Today's passage comes from the book of Esther which is an account of how God saved his people through Esther. It was written at a time where some of the Jews were still in exile under Persian rule and some were back in Jerusalem. And one of the most unique characteristics of the book is that it doesn't explicitly mention God, yet shows how he's in control and working behind the scenes of all that's going on.

Today we'll be looking at Esther 4:4-17, which ends up being a major turning point in the story of being used for God's purposes as Esther has a series of interactions with her uncle Mordecai. In the chapters before this passage, we learn that Esther has become the wife of King Xerxes. Now, five years later, a guy named Haaman set into motion his plan to kill all of the Jews in Persia. And now Mordecai has come to Esther to ask for her help.

Scripture Reading

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. 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 into 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?" 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.

This is God’s Word.

Sermon Introduction

How many decisions do you think you make on average a day? Some Experts say up to 35,000 almost subconscious decisions. Other say we make about 122 conscious decisions a day - often spending up to 3 hrs figuring out what to eat, when to sleep, what to wear, and what to watch.

Leadership expert John C. Maxwell famously put it like this —“Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.” And in a sense this is true. Our decisions end up having an unavoidable impact on our lives.

And as this is the case, we should ask ourselves, “What decisions have I made when it comes to living as a Christian?” As we look into today’s passage, The One Thing that I want you wrestle and respond to is:

The One Thing

We must make the personal decision to live as God’s people

Overview

What does it mean to live as God’s people? There are three characteristics that we see in this passage on what it means to live as God’s people: Be confident in God, Be surrendered to God, and Be dependent on God

- I. Be Confident in God
 - a. Be Confident in His Grace
 - b. Be Confident in His Sovereignty
- II. Be Surrendered to God
 - a. Be Surrendered to Face Death for Him
 - b. Be Surrendered to Live Life for Him
- III. Be Dependent on God
 - a. Depend on Him in Community
 - b. Depend on Him as You Step Out in Faith

I. Be Confident in God

We live in an age where it’s really hard to have confidence and trust in one another. We live in the age of Mr. & Mrs. Smith.



For those of you who don't know, the movie Mr and Mrs. Smith is about a married couple where both the husband and wife are spies from different groups, who keep their identity a secret until some stuff goes down later in the movie.

Even though it's just a movie, it reflects our culture in that it can feel like even the people closest to you might be lying or hiding something critical about themselves. Where it's hard to be confident that what people say and what they actually do will match up.

And it often makes it hard to trust in God.

And yet what we see in this passage is that God's people should trust and be confident in who God is.

The first thing we see is that we should be confident in his grace

a. Be Confident in His Grace

What's interesting about Esther is that even though she is the main character of the story, she doesn't have a squeaky clean backstory or even a really honorable one. We see that especially as we consider the following:

She's an orphan who got to the place where she is in life basically because of her looks.

Even though she's Jewish, she participated in the king's harem like the other girls and eventually got married to a Gentile king.

Not only that, consider how different she is from Daniel.

For those of us who are familiar with Daniel, you might remember that even though Daniel was also a Jew living in exile, he was such a faithful Jew, that everyone around him knew he was a Jew by how he lived. That's

why his opponents said that if they were going to get him with anything, it would be in regards to him following his Jewish customs and laws.

On the contrary, not only did Esther actively hide the fact that she was a Jew, but apparently nothing in the way that she lived gave it away either.

And yet even though she has this kind of gray backstory with sexually ambiguous morality and not really living out her faith, that doesn't disqualify her from being used by God!

Esther's story is a good reminder for us that unlike what many people may think, God is really gracious. That he doesn't deal with us the way that we might think he would - that being sinful would disqualify us from being used and loved by him. But rather, just like it says in Romans, where sin abounds, God's grace abounds the more. (Romans 5:20-21).

This is so different from the moralistic gods of other religions or even from the moralistic culture that we live in. Outside of Christianity, it's our morality or our ability or our experience that make us candidates worthy of approval or acceptance. But not so here. God using this orphaned, spiritually ambiguous girl reminds us that he really is gracious towards his people.

So even as we think about our lives, we have to trust and have confidence that God really is as gracious as he says he is.

Not only that, we see that we must **be confident in his sovereignty.**

b. Be Confident in His Grace

What's interesting about Esther is that even though she is the main character of the story, she doesn't have a squeaky clean backstory or even a really honorable one. We see that especially as we consider the following:

- She's an orphan who got to the place where she is in life basically because of her looks.
- Even though she's Jewish, she participated in the king's harem like the other girls and eventually got married to a Gentile king.
- Not only that, consider how different she is from Daniel.
 - For those of us who are familiar with Daniel, you might remember that even though Daniel was also a Jew living in exile, he was such a faithful Jew, that everyone around him knew he was a Jew by how he lived. That's why his opponents said that if they were going to get him with anything, it would be in regards to him following his Jewish customs and laws.
 - On the contrary, not only did Esther actively hide the fact that she was a Jew, but apparently nothing in the way that she lived gave it away either.
- **And yet even though she has this kind of gray backstory with sexually ambiguous morality and not really living out her faith, that doesn't disqualify her from being used by God!**

Esther's story is a good reminder for us that unlike what many people may think, God is really gracious. That he doesn't deal with us the way that we might think he would - that being sinful would disqualify us from being used and loved by him. But rather, just like it says in Romans, where sin abounds, God's grace abounds the more. (Romans 5:20-21).

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So even as we think about our lives, we have to trust and have confidence that God really is as gracious as he says he is.

Not only that, we see that we must **be confident in his sovereignty**.

c. Be Confident in His Sovereignty

In his back and forth with Esther, Mordecai's final question to Esther is "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

And his question makes more explicit what we've seen in the story till now:

- Out of all possible times, King Xerxes sends away his wife and looks for a replacement at this particular time when Esther is living in the city of Susa
- Out of all the possible candidates, Esther is chosen
- Out of all the possible people who could've found out about Haman's plot to kill the Jews, it's Esther's uncle Mordecai who finds out
- And out of all the uncle-niece pairs there are, it's these two, who may be some of the only people who are in position to try to stop it.

And what's interesting is that for Mordecai, the question is "who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" but as the readers, we know, and we know that it was God who put her there.

Like, yes, on one level, there were real events and real people and real decisions that made it so that Esther got into the kingdom - and all of those things are really real and meaningful. But on another level, from a different perspective, we also see that it was God who put her there. That's how God's sovereignty works.

On one level, for better or worse, we make real decisions that can have good or bad consequences. But on another level, we have a God who is in control and can use all things for his purposes.

Jesus reiterates God's sovereignty in Matthew 10 when he says,

Matthew 10:29-30, "29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered."

The preacher Charles Spurgeon once famously said that even the dust mites floating in the air do so under the sovereignty of God.

Have no doubt about it, family. You're not where you are by random or by accident.

God is sovereign - he is in control - and he has placed you where you are for a reason, for his reasons.

You're not in Indonesia by accident. You're not at your job by random chance. You being here this morning is not outside of God's control. You being alive today is part of God's purposes.

If we're going to be God's people, we have to believe that his sovereignty really does stretch and cover over our lives.

As his people, we have to have confidence that God is gracious - that he really would use messed up people like us - and that God is sovereign, that he's in control, that in conjunction with whatever decisions we've made to get us where we are, for better or worse, that God has put us where we are for a purpose.

What would it look like for you to trust that God really is gracious? Would you be more willing to trust him? To turn to him? To believe that he can work, not only in, but also through your life?

What would it look like for you to trust that God is sovereign? That whatever your intentions might be about being where you are, that God has plans for you too? What would it look like to live with daily purpose just from the fact that you know God put you where you are on purpose?

As we continue, we see that we are not only to be confident in God, but **we must also surrender to God** to live as his people.

II. Be Surrendered to God

As Mordecai puts more and more pressure on Esther so that she will go to the king to intercede for the Jews, Esther finally reaches a point where she makes the costly decision to identify herself with the people of God and **surrenders herself to God** with whatever the outcome might be.

Esther's willingness to surrender herself to God reflects something about our relationship with God that Bible Scholar Andrew Schmutzer describes in this way, "Committing to God will cost more than we can know, but almost never less than our whole selves."

It's like how a couple getting married commit to one another on their wedding day, and yet there's no way that they know what the next years and decades of marriage will demand of them. And surely what marriage demands of them will be no less than their whole selves. Similarly, committing to God requires us to surrender ourselves fully to him. And Esther shows us how we should be surrendered to God in two ways.

a. Be Surrendered to Face Death for Him

In v.11, Esther tells Mordecai that everyone knows that you can't just go up to King Xerxes without getting an invite. And if you do go without an invite, you will be put to death, unless he's gracious enough to extend his scepter to you. And it's helpful she tells Mordecai because most of us might not have known that.

But it makes sense: you can't just walk into the White House and chill with the president because you have something you want to say.

And Herodotos, the Greek historian confirms that this was a protocol for some of the Persian kings. And so even though she's his wife, she can't just waltz in there and talk to him about what's going on.

Mordecai's response is interesting. He basically says, "you're worried about dying? Girl, if you don't do anything you're going to 100% for sure die, either because somehow people will find out that you're Jewish or some other way."

(Interestingly, because they're not directly talking to one another face to face, he's basically revealing to the messenger that Esther is Jewish, all the more increasing the likelihood that she's going to be found out and then be in the same boat.)

Mordecai is basically saying, "Look, if you don't do anything, you're gonna die 100%. But maybe, just maybe God put you here to intercede for his people, and when you go to the king, he won't kill you."

And that's when Esther famously decides that she's going to go see the king and "If I perish, I perish." She's surrendered even to the possibility of death as she bets on God's sovereignty and saving grace. **This is where you see Esther's story start to change. She's going from a *self-preserving bystander to a self-sacrificing intercessor.***

And it's not surrendering just to face death, but we see that we should also **be surrendered to live life for him.**

b. Be Surrendered to Live Life for Him

She's not just facing death for no reason, but she's going to "go to the king" to plead for salvation for the Jews. Instead of doing what she wants, instead of staying far away from the injustice and threat to God's people, instead of living for herself, she's choosing to live for God and his people.

This is the challenge for us: Like Esther, we are living in a day and age where it is not easy to be living as the people of God (new flash: it's never been.) But in all seriousness, it's getting harder and harder socially, just to be a regular old Bible believing, Jesus following, neighbor loving Christian. And like Esther, there are risks and costs and difficulties with identifying ourselves with the people of God. Because identifying ourselves as Christians is not just about having "Christian" on our ID card.

Rather the question for us is, "will we be surrendered to God even if it means death? Will we be surrendered to God to the point of living for him?"

Similar to what Mordecai points out, what's ironic is that all of us face death. All of us will inevitably die. One of the Founding Fathers of the United States Benjamin Franklin famously wrote "nothing is certain except death and taxes." Musician Steve Earle adds on "The truth is, you can not pay your taxes. I've done it, and there's consequences, but it can be done. Death you're not going to get out of, and you kind of got to deal with it."

We're all going to die one way or the other. Are we willing then, to take the one life we have, and live it surrendered to God?

Missionary Jim Elliot once famously put it like this,

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (Jim Elliot)

None of us are able to keep our lives forever. And yet for those who are in Christ, we do gain a life that we will never lose.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 16 and Luke 9 that the more we try to preserve our lives, the more we will end up losing it. And on the flip side, the more we lose our lives for his sake, we end up finding our lives.

Similarly, the more we try to preserve our lives, the less we see God's purpose for our lives. And the more we lose our lives for him, the more we get to live out God's purposes for us as his children.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we have to live our lives in a more risky way; I'm saying that we have to live our lives in a more surrendered way. Where we're dying to ourselves and living for him.

What would it look like for you to die to yourself? To die to your self-centeredness and to put Christ as the center instead?

What would it look like for you to surrender and go beyond what's normal to serve and love the people that God leads you to? Your coworkers, your neighbors, your friends?

As we die to ourselves and live for Christ, we will live out God's purpose for our lives more and more.

Lastly, as God's people, we must **be dependent on God**

C. Be Dependent on God

What we're reminded of in this passage is that **God's people are dependent on him because what he calls us to is not something we can handle on our own.**

As the passage reaches its most tense point, Esther resolves that she will depend on the Lord by declaring a fast. And by doing so we learn two things about how God's people are dependent on God.

a. Depend on Him in Community

"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf."

First of all, isn't it interesting that this is not a solo endeavor? Up to this point, most of the story has been around Esther and Mordecai. And you'd think that they would have what it takes in order to save the day. But no, in their depending on God, they are doing it in the context of community. Isn't it interesting that Esther living out her purposes involves other people supporting her along the way?

For the earlier two points, being confident in God and being surrendered to God are things that no one else can do on your behalf. Not your family, not your leaders, not your life group can do these things on your behalf. There's a responsibility and a call for us to take our faith seriously as we make these personal decisions.

And yet we aren't to do this Christian walk alone. Figuring out, living out your God given calling isn't something that you are to do alone. We're not striving to be the person of God, but the people of God. That's why following Jesus is done in community. We support one another. We challenge one another. We love, serve, and encourage one another along the way.

That's one of the reasons that a church you're doing the One Desire Fast together. It's not just hundreds of individuals fasting and praying on their own, independent of one another. But rather, as the whole church, you're coming together to seek God in prayer and fasting.

It's one tangible way to remind ourselves and to demonstrate that we really do need God; that we depend on him. More than on our ayam bakar or sop buntut that we need the power of God to work in our lives. That we are people hungry - not just for pempek and martabak manis, but for the Word of God to dwell richly in us.

That as a church, that you need more than the sum of insightful strategy and disciplined execution, but that you need the anointing and the power of the Holy Spirit to animate our efforts to bring forth real fruit.

And so we fast, depending on God, and we do it together.

b. Depend on Him As You Step Out in Faith

"Then I will go to the king..."

The last thing that we see is that depending on God doesn't mean that we don't have to do anything. Rather, just like we said before, on one level, God is the one moving and orchestrating things and as such, we desperately depend on him. On another level, we are also to actively step out in faith.

It's what another missionary, William Carey once said,

"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God." (William Carey)

That's why we see Esther resolve to go to Xerxes and plead for the Jews after they fast. She's depending on him as she actively steps out in faith.

Similarly, as the people of God, we are to trust him **as** we move forward according to his word. We don't just passively wait around, making excuses. No, we move forward in faith, depending on him even as we seek to actively obey and live worshipfully.

What would it look like for you to actively step out in faith as you depend on God? For most of us, it's not going to look exactly like Esther. Rather, it might be how you respond when you see a coworker in pain, when you consider forgiving a family member who hurt you. It may have more to do with how you respond when you see the physical, emotional, financial, and spiritual needs of the people around you, in your city.

In all this, as we look at this passage, God is challenging us today that as his people, we are to be confident in him, surrender to him, and depend on him, **but that's not all**.

As much as Esther teaches us about how we are to live as God's people, we have to avoid the mistake of viewing ourselves too much like Esther **as if all the weight is now on us to live like Esther did or else God's people will perish**. Which would be horrible, because there's no way that we're consistently confident in God or always surrendered to him or steadfastly dependent on him, and that means that God's people would have no hope.

Rather, this passage is here also to set the stage for someone else, who, like Esther, was used by God to save his people.

- To point to another person who was sent "for such a time as this" or as Galatians has it, "when the fullness of time had come."
- To foreshadow the one who would echo the surrender of "If I perish, I perish" when he said "Not my will, but your will be done" in the garden.
- To get us ready for the one who didn't just fast for 3 days, but for 40 days in the desert, who depended on God even as he said "the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing."
- To lead us to the one who surrendered not to potential death, but to certain death to save God's people!

Esther's story is here to let us know that just as God used Esther to save his people temporarily while in exile, that God used Jesus to save his people forever for all eternity. And that's good news for us. We have been saved because like Esther, Jesus interceded to the real King of Kings for our sake.

And because Jesus' life demonstrates God's grace and sovereignty, **we really can be confident in God**.

- Because he shows us how God works all things for the good of those who love him, **we really can surrender ourselves to God**.
- And because he demonstrates God's power in his resurrection, **we know that we can really depend on him**.
- Because Jesus saved his people, we can live as his people.

The One Thing

We must make the personal decision to live as God's people

Life Application

1. Ask for faith to trust God as His people
2. Acknowledge what makes it hard for you to surrender
3. Actively depend on God through prayer

Conclusion

Church family, there are many important decisions that we must make in life. Hundreds, every day. And yet I want to encourage you with this as we close. What's amazing is that before you made any decisions, God made the decision to send his son to live, die, and be raised on our behalf, because he is a good God and he loves you.

And because he has done this, for all of God's people, we can know that not only can he redeem any bad decisions you've made, he also now lives in you and empowers you to make God honoring, Christ centered decisions every day.