

# Esther and Courage

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you haven't seen Evan Almighty, do watch it. This is the bit where actually she's just about to leave her husband. She's just about to go. She's had enough and she meets with God. And he says, just get back in there. It's an opportunity to be courageous. During World War II in Germany, there were Christians, many Christians, who turned their eyes away from the annihilation of the Jews. And it was a sad chapter in the history of the German church. And in World War II, at the end of World War II, the German church wrote a statement. And in that statement, it was a guy who was called Martin Niemöller, who was one of the ministers, and spoke of the consequences of not speaking out, of not being courageous. And he wrote these words, first they came for the communists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the socialists, but I didn't speak out because I wasn't a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist. And then they came for me, but there was no one left to speak for me.

The thing in the story of Esther is we're told about a challenge, and that a challenge that we have to take because she is called to speak out. She is called to speak out into what was then the Jewish faith that was about to be annihilated. And she decided that she had to make a stand and be courageous, who stood for them in their darkest hour. And people celebrate in the Jewish faith, Queen Esther, she is revered because she risked her life, and she stepped out in courage for them. That's what our reading was about this morning. And in fact, in every story, we love a villain, don't we? Pantomime season comes when Captain Hook steps onto the stage. People love to boo, everybody loves a villain. Everybody loves a villain. And in this story, it's Haman. And Haman, like many before him and many to come, has gone up the greasy pole, if you like, of success, climbing on other people. He has leadership in his sight, and he doesn't care who gets in the way. And it's a time when he issues an edict to the people that all the Jews will be killed. And if you haven't read the book of Esther, please read it. It's my sort of book. Because I'm a visual learner, it's small. It's a very thin book. So read it, please. But it's a great story. You see, King Xerxes has a bit of an issue with women. He had a real issue with women. In fact, he said, I don't want any woman to come into my presence unless I say so. But Esther knows that it's got to be her. And she's going to risk everything to go into the king's presence. And Mordecai, her cousin, was mortified for his people to think that they would be annihilated. And yet Esther comes along at this time. She felt it. She knew it. She knew that God had placed this on her heart for her people. And she couldn't ignore it. Many people here will feel that. Maybe you've been praying long and hard for an area, for a group of people, maybe for an individual, where you know, God has given me a heart for this.

[ 3 : 56 ] Maybe it's somebody under your roof. Maybe it's somebody who you live with. Maybe it's somebody who you work with. Maybe it's a group in our community that you have been called to. But you will know. You will know that Esther moment when God has laid something on your heart and said, I have to do something about this. I have to step out in courage. And she was put, it wasn't a coincidence that God placed her in that time. No, it wasn't. Was it? Was she able to do something about it? Yes, she was. What did it take? It took courage. Courage, raw and simple.

For if you remain silent, it says in scripture this morning, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place. It will come from somewhere else. It will happen. But you and your father's family now will perish. And who knows, but that you have come to this royal position for such a time as this. Esther, it's your time, says Mordecai. Do you know those moments? Those God-given opportunities where your heart thumps, your stomach churns, and you know this is of God. And that was Esther.

There are times, people, when God places you in a position where last week we said here, and thank you to my podcast followers who send me emails on Monday morning. That's very kind of

you.

But where it said last week, you have to get off the fence. There are two choices. Either you can slide behind the fence and hide away from it, or you can get off the fence and go both feet in with God, as he wants you to do. Step into the opportunity. And whether there is social justice, a courageous conversation that you have to have, especially if it's about idols, and idols will get in your way.

And as I was reading about Esther, I thought, think of the things that get in the way of courage. Think of those things. And we can make idols out of anything to get in the way. To be honest, the church is very good at it. We make idols out of furniture. We must never move that, because it was placed there in 1935. And it's got a plaque on it, which means it must never be moved.

[ 6 : 35 ] There are things that we can make our idols out of. It may be liturgy. We're not allowed to do it that way, because it's always been done that way. And so we can be safe in that.

I was thinking this week, I was in one of those meetings where you wish you weren't in one of those meetings, you know, and you think, are these people Christians? And I thought in the middle of that, I thought, do you know what? We've got this amazing roof over our heads. We've got this amazing building.

We've got food. We've got warmth. We've got coffee. We've got freedom. Nobody's going to come through the door in a minute and arrest us. Rather than realizing what we've got at stake. And often the church of God, on a Sunday, sadly, we take it as the church at rest. We are not the church at rest.

You people, we are a powerhouse. That's what we're here for. We're here to be empowered, encouraged, enthused, and excited, and challenged to go out to do what God wants us to do. Do you feel that energy?

Yes. Yes. That's so good. I'm not in that meeting anymore. And here, people needed to hear about the saving love of God because people's lives are at stake. And that is what the Esther story is about this morning. People's lives are at stake. And that's where it connects with us because people's lives are at stake. She didn't want to see a nation lost. She didn't want to see a nation eradicated.

[ 8 : 25 ] And maybe you feel like that when you read the paper. I don't want to see a nation going in a downward spiral because God has hope and wants us, his people, to be courageous. I don't know how many people that are here this morning, but all it took was one person, and it was Esther. It takes one person to make a difference. You see, the book of Esther raises up for me a courage and spirit to go and rescue people. It's an opportunity. It's a challenge. And what we as Christians need to be getting out of bed for in the morning. That's what it's about. It's about encouragement and challenge. Esther saw the pain on Mordecai for his people. And she knew that she knew that she had been placed in a position to do something about it and that God was with her. Do you know, I read this story through the week and I thought, what does that say to people on a Sunday? What does that say to me? First thing it said to me is I need to get involved. I can't stand back anymore. I need to be in there. Because you know as well the government cutbacks that have taken place. Do you know what? This week, this last few days, this last couple of weeks actually, I've written more references for people in this church than I've ever written before. For people who want to go out into the community and serve the community.

You may have been sat in here a few weeks ago and we had transforming lives for good. What a great strapline for a group, for an organisation. But there are people here who are going to go out into our local schools and transform lives for good. You've got a leaflet this morning that's been given to you, I hope if you haven't, grab one, to fund Will's ministry. It is about changing lives. It's being courageous to go out and do something. We as a church have grabbed the opportunity. People who have seen the need and said, do you know what? I want to get involved. There will be people here who will be going off to serve on falcon camps. There will be people here who are going to serve at New Wine.

There will be people here who will be going to Hill House to serve the community this summer. People, we are being motivated to go out, but we need to do it all together.

Do you want courage? Because this morning I want to encourage your courage and embolden your bold. I want to encourage your courage and embolden your bold because that's what Esther says to us this morning. Second thing, it's not all about me. Because in Esther it wasn't all about her. She could have disappeared. She could have done what she needed to do, but she had to step out. You

see, we would all like often to lead a quiet life, but that's not what the Christian faith is all about. You see, the church being motivated and understanding of what God's needs are for the community.

[ 11 : 45 ] I used to sneak out at lunchtime when I was working in London, just around the corner and used to go to the Tate Gallery, very posh. And I always wondered why they put the seats a long way back from the picture. But of course I learned that because as you walk around, if you stand there, you don't see it.

Do you? You don't see it until you step back and you step back and you step back and you sit down and then you see it. You see the bigger picture. And sometimes we need the courage to see God's bigger picture that we are a part of, that he wants us to get involved with. You know, when we're caught up in our own preferences, we don't see what God sees. And so I challenge you about our own preferences.

And the third thing is the thing that squashes courage. If you want your courage squashed, have self-interest and self-preservation, because it will truly squash any courage within you.

When the world watched on the 5th of June, 1989, and I remember it well, a man with two bags who walked into Tenement Square in China and stood in front of a tank. He risked everything, but stood for his humanity. He risked it all, but what courage it took. Maybe sometimes we need that courage. When did we last stand for truth? When did we stand rather than shy away? When did we sit and allow justice to just pass by?

My self-interest, like Esther's, should come second. God had a job for her. He's got a job for us. And maybe as we've heard about prayer ministry this morning, if maybe if you've never been for prayer ministry before, maybe this morning of all mornings you go and you say, Lord, what is it where you want me to stand? What area of my life is it? Show me, because I want to make a difference.

[ 14 : 03 ] On the 1st of December, 1955, it took one woman, one woman to sit down for a whole nation to stand up.

Her name was Rosa Parks. She'd had enough in America of segregation. And as a black woman, she got onto that bus that day and sat in a seat. And she refused to move because she said, there isn't justice in this. I refused to get up and go to the back of that bus.

And with that, she got arrested and it all kicked off. Here's her story. A woman of courage, a woman like Esther, to inspire us this morning. I remember well these struggles that we went to during my childhood when the Ku Klux Klan was very active. It just made us stronger to continue the struggle for freedom.

And this was the seat that I took as I got on the bus. A few white people voted the bus.

And one man was left standing. And I certainly did not plan to stand up. And I didn't consider myself breaking the law because I was in what was supposed to be either part of the bus.

[ 15 : 42 ] So my arrest brought about a protest from the people of Montgomery that lasted 381 days.

And when we did go back on the bus, we didn't, the Supreme Code had handed down a decision that there would be no more racial segregation in transportation. When I was on the bus the time I was arrested, the only thing that was on my mind was that I did not want to be treated in that way. It took her sitting down to get a people to stand up. And we can never, ever, ever forget her for that. It takes one person. And that person may be you and I. It doesn't happen by accident. God calls us to step into those places. And this morning, I encourage you to encourage your courage and embolden your bold.

To risk, as Esther did. It risks our reputation. It can risk our freedom. It can risk so many things.

[ 17 : 01 ] But some things you see, you think, this is not right. I need to stand. I want to see my friends come to Christ. Why should I just step back? I need to have that courageous conversation.

I need to have that courageous stand in my workplace. Where does my strength come from? My strength comes in the name of the Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What can we learn for Esther's story? What steps will we take to see God's kingdom come? And it risks much. I'm just going to finish with a poem that was read to me by a 14-year-old girl. Actually, it changed my thought and encouraged my courage. Because she read this poem, for me, it was a game changer, because she decided that she would stand for her faith in her class where she was the only Christian.

And she was 14. And she read this poem. To laugh is to risk looking a fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out for another is to risk involvement. To show feelings is to risk revealing your true self. To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss. To love is to risk rejection.

To live is to risk dying. To hope is to risk despair. To try is to risk failure. But risks must be taken. Because one of the greatest dangers in life is to risk nothing.

[ 18 : 50 ] Those who risk nothing. Those who risk nothing, do nothing, achieve nothing, and become nothing. They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, or even live.

Chained by their uncertainties, they are slaves and they have fortified their freedom. Only a person who risks all they cannot keep to gain all that they can never lose is truly free.