

Such a Time As This

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[0 : 00] Esther chapter 4. You see the points to follow us we'll be seeing, we pray through our thoughts on this part of God's Word, the faithful response, the faithful response of Mordecai to Haman's plot to destroy the Jews, and then the faint-hearted response of Esther initially and her hesitancy to do anything directly in relation to saving the Jews, but then thirdly her fearless response in committing herself to that work of salvation. But our main verse to focus in on on this chapter is chapter 4 verse 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've come or you have not come to the kingdom at such a time as this.

Exactly 80 years ago, a defining moment came in this country to change, to change the course of history. the day on the 15th of September 1940, the day when the German Luftwaffe, the German Air Force, failed to defeat the RAF, the Royal Air Force, in that Battle of Britain. That day that even this afternoon was commemorated at Westminster Abbey in the annual service of thanksgiving for the deliverance of this country and indeed in many respects the deliverance of Europe, even there in 1940, 80 years ago. And of course Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, famously said, of that day, of that occasion, never in the field of human conflict, was so much owed by so many to so few. And of course the RAF heroes, young men, many in their early twenties, known affectionately as the few, the few to whom the nation certainly is utterly grateful.

And if a few saved the nation from Nazi invasion in 1914, all that that would conjure up all the consequences of that for the church, because if the Nazis came our church would have been destroyed, as we know it. The Jews in the land would have been totally annihilated. Europe would have fallen if Hitler's plans had gone to plan. But it was the few who made that difference. And when we see the story here of Mordecai and Esther, these two Jewish individuals, these few individuals there in that Persian Empire, when we see the difference that these few made, humanly speaking, under God's sovereignty, then we recognize the importance of human responsibility hand in hand with God's sovereignty.

God's sovereign purpose is working out, being worked out, and being worked out through the few whom God had blessed, whom God sent at a particular time in history to further God's purposes. And the more we explore this theme of human responsibility, hand in hand with God's sovereignty, the more we'll realize how God works, how God works out his purposes for the glory of his name, even working out these purposes through individuals, even through, even the few in our land, even today, that God will have the glory.

[4 : 05] And God does place his people, God places those who are his places, you and your small corner, exactly where he wants you to be, where he wants his church to be, where he wants those who are his witnesses to shine for him in the work that God gives his people to do.

And of course, when we realize that truth, then we see, of course, the great news of salvation, the great work of salvation, carried out by one man, the Lord Jesus.

One man who came from heaven to earth. One man who lived that life of perfect obedience to his heavenly father. One man who conquered sin, conquered Satan on the cross.

One man who conquered death in his resurrection three days after his death on the cross. One man who changed the world.

One man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine son of God, the son of man. And of course, in our own lives, we can't compare our lives with the life of the Lord Jesus in the sense of, you know, undergoing defining moments in our work for the Lord.

[5 : 25] Nevertheless, you who are his, you are chosen, you are called to work the works that God has given you to do, to fulfill his purposes, just as God used Mordecai and Esther in the work that God had given them to do for the salvation of the Jews.

And as we see in the story, particularly in relation to Esther, then we pray that we will be encouraged from what we see in Esther. Esther, because Esther, as we'll see initially, was very, very reluctant to be so fully involved in the work of saving her people.

That initial faint-heartedness that so often we ourselves can be prone to when God calls us to do a particular work for him. But we pray we'll be encouraged when we see Esther moving from faint-hearted faith, as it were, to fearless faith in the works that God gave her to do and that she accomplished with all her heart.

And so when we have come to this chapter in chapter four of Esther, then we're going to look at this great theme before us, the working of human responsibility hand-in-hand with God's sovereignty. And it's that reality that's seen when, well, when God brings defining moments into your life, these moments that test your faith, these moments that test your resolve to serve him with all that you are, these defining moments that test your obedience, and these defining moments that God brings to your life, that God's so foreordained, for you to show that strength of faith to do God's will as God makes his will known to you.

[7 : 21] Even at these times in which we're living in, even these times that we're living in, even at this very moment when our faith has been tested, when we're given this, you might say, this opportunity to trust in God through these difficult times.

And these times, we pray that are deepening our faith in the one true God, so that even through these times that we're living through, that we put him first, first in all our ways, and know what truly matters, and know what truly has to be these priorities in our life.

God has given us this time to stand for him, to speak for him, to witness it for him, and to trust in him, and not to be afraid.

And I pray that we'll see that clearly in the chapter here that we've read in Esther chapter 4. And as we look at this chapter, as we consider the events that we've seen up till now, these events happening in that great empire, the greatest empire that had existed up till that point anyway in time, we see how there had been such a serious turn of events for the Jewish people in every land within that empire.

If you remember from chapter 3, God has shown us that the king, King Xerxes, had promoted this individual Haman, this evil individual, to a position of honor and power, our equivalent of prime minister.

[9 : 05] And in that promotion, the king had ordered that everyone should bow before Haman. But Mordecai, Queen Esther's cousin, Mordecai refused to show honor to an individual, to a mere man.

Mordecai the Jew, Mordecai, Esther's cousin, would not bow before Haman. And Haman, in his arrogance, took offense. Took offense not just at this individual, but offense at the individual's people, the Jewish people.

And because of this perceived insult to Haman, Haman had planned to destroy the Jews. A date was set for the destruction of the Jews, 11 months from that time when the lots were cast to decide that when the Jews should perish.

The Jewish people, as it were, had 11 months before that terrible catastrophe. And the question, of course, arising in the minds, the hearts of the Jewish people, where is God in all this?

Is God going to abandon us? Has God forgotten to be gracious? 11 months time, we're going to be destroyed. Will evil triumph?

[10 : 21] But of course, evil will not triumph. God hadn't forgotten to be gracious. And, you know, we really have to be reminded of this.

And even in our own dark times, these times that we're living in, times that we're living through, even times when we see evil raise its ugly head against God's church, against God's name, against our Savior, the Lord Jesus, as we're living through these dark and difficult times, we have to be reminded that evil will not triumph.

That God sets Satan limits. And these limits cannot be crossed and traversed. Evil will not triumph. And we have to remember that God is on the throne.

And remember that God's not going to be toppled from that throne. And remember too that the bride, the church, the church that God loves has Christ as the bride.

And there's no separation of the church from Christ the bride. Christ's church is that blood-bought church that he bought with his life on the cross.

[11 : 34] And the church will not be separated from the love of the Lord Jesus. And so may that again be of encouragement to you as you consider this very time that we're living in.

So that you might be strong and courageous. Strong and courageous in the Lord. Even as we see Mordecai, particularly initially, strong and courageous in his fearlessness, in his faith to stand for that which is true, even in opposing the desires and designs of evil men.

And so let's look at that strength and courage that Mordecai exercised, that faithful response.

Because as we saw in the passage, Mordecai learns of Haman's decree.

He learns of the approaching massacre that's all planned to happen in 11 months' time. He, one man, Mordecai, the few, as it were, he stood up against Haman.

For his single-handed defiance against this wicked man, then the consequences seem to be not just against him, but against the entire Jewish race.

[12:50] And in Mordecai's sorrow, he puts on sackcloth and ashes, the cultural way of showing distress and anguish.

He's in so much distress. So much distress that other people notice this and tell Esther. Esther's informed of Mordecai's behavior. Esther wants to send him new clothes to replace the sackcloth that he's wearing at the king's gate.

And obviously something so distressed, Mordecai, that Esther sends someone else, another servant, to find out from Mordecai why Mordecai is behaving as he is.

And Mordecai tells the servant Hamach, this individual Hamach, of the news that for some reason Esther hadn't heard in the royal palace.

But Mordecai tells the servant the plans of Haman. And Mordecai urges Esther to go into the king's presence and urge the king to prevent the atrocity.

[13:58] Mordecai can't do this. He's forbidden to go into the king's presence. But Mordecai will do what he can do. He'll do what's possible for him to do.

And he's not going to be silent. He's got a relative. He's got a cousin in the king's palace. And Mordecai is going to use this opportunity to alert her and for her to trust in God for the success of these actions.

Mordecai is using the wisdom that God has given him to seek to make that difference. He's just a mere individual.

He's got no power in the land. He's got no influence beyond his cousin Esther. But he's going to act for the sake of his people. He's going to act for the sake of the glory of God's name.

And that resolve, that fearless response, that fearless resolve of Mordecai is really something that each one of us should take notice of and put into practice.

[15:03] Here's one man amongst millions. Here's one voice amongst millions. He could have adopted the attitude, you know, that we often adopt ourselves.

Who am I? Who am I to make that difference? Who am I to be used of God for the ferventance of his purposes? Who am I among so many? Who am I of no influence in the land?

I'm just one out of many. He could have had that attitude. But no, he wouldn't take that attitude that we can so easily stumble over. Even that attitude that says that if God's in control, then what am I to do?

How can I make that difference? It's the kind of attitude that we see, of course, in many occasions in the past and even the present. Many of you will know the example of the missionary William Carey.

William Carey in the late 18th century, he was justized by a fellow minister when William Carey spoke about the value of overseas mission.

[16:10] And Carey was told these words from this colleague. He said, young man, sit down. You are an enthusiast.

And that was a term of great insult at the time, an enthusiast. You're an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me.

But as many of you know in the story, Carey didn't listen to that man. He listened to the voice of God. And Carey embarked on his mission to India and served God in India for 41 years.

And Carey used the motto that he took with him. That motto, again, that many of you will know and I pray will use. Expect great things from God.

Attempt great things for God. And in that critical moment there in the Persian Empire, Mordecai wasn't going to sit back and expect great things from God without attempting this one great thing for God.

[17:17] Mordecai was going to send his message to Esther to speak to the king to seek to reverse the plans of evil Haman. But what about Esther?

What about Esther and her response to the news of the impending disaster against her fellow Jews? Well, we see first of all her faint-hearted response as we see in verses 10 to 11.

Esther's hesitant. Esther's hesitant. I mean, for five years, again, we can work out the chronology. For five years, she's lived, we might say, in very much a trouble-free existence.

She's had no worries as queen. She's made no great decisions. Everything seems to be going so well for her there in the palace. But when Mordecai sends the message to Esther about the apparent, what seems to be an apparent inevitability of the destruction of the Jews, certainly inevitable from a human perspective, when Mordecai sends that message to Esther, Esther's shaken to the core.

And we might say that a defining moment has come to Esther. Esther, is she going to do what Mordecai is asking her to do? Is she going to go into the king's presence?

[18:44] Even though she hasn't been called for 30 days, even though to go into the king's presence might endanger, indeed, cause her life to be lost.

She knows the consequence of what might happen if she goes into the king's presence to seek his reversal of Haman's plans.

She knows that even though she's queen, she's got no automatic right to come into the king's presence. What will she do? Yes, we know, of course, from the passage, we know we have the full story.

We've got the book of Esther. We know that eventually she does go into the king's presence and makes that difference. But at this moment that we find in the chapter and the story, she's hesitant because what she's doing, she's seeing the difficulties rather than trust with all her heart and the God who's placed her in that position, who's placed her exactly where God wants her to be.

You know, when we think even of our own times, when we're so prone to doubting God in our times of indecision, when God calls you to do something for him and we hesitate, we do it because we see the difficulties from a human perspective, but we fail to acknowledge God who's with us, God who calls you to do great things for him.

[20:13] And in our own lives as believers, your life as a believer, you who've given your life to him, it's so easy that we know from our times, from our experiences, that we so often fail to act in faith, in God's promises.

We so often fail to act in faith, in God's provision for us. God has promised to be with us at all times, to strengthen us at all times.

And it's for you and for me to have that courage, that strength of faith, to stand for the Lord Jesus. Yes, even in these difficult times in which we're living.

And our Lord calls each one of you who are his, be that mountain mover. So when difficulties arise, be that mountain mover.

Call in the God of all grace to give you that strength and these defining moments that God gets you to serve him. Do it with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and not to be afraid.

[21:21] Yes, there'll be times when you'll need to be encouraged. And yes, even times when you need to be chastised to do the work that God has given you to do when you hesitate. Even as Mordecai had to chastise his cousin Esther to do the work that Mordecai knew God had given Esther to do.

And so we see from Esther's faint-hearted response, we see the change that happens in Esther's heart. We see a fearless response.

We've been reading the book of Esther, the book that has given its name after Queen Esther. She's the heroine for whom the book is called after.

She does intercede for her people to save her people. But of course, the more immediate hero up to this point has been Mordecai. And Mordecai hasn't been put off by Esther's initial faint-heartedness.

He's not been put off by Esther's initial indecision. Mordecai's not going to back down when he hears of Esther's indecision, her hesitancy.

[22:36] Because Mordecai realises that here's a divinely given opportunity for Esther to show and to reveal why she's been placed in that particular position as Queen in the Persian Empire.

And so Mordecai persists. He perseveres. He continues to communicate with Esther through the go-betweens. And telling her that she's got to act. And not just to save herself, but to save her people. Because if she remains silent, if she doesn't go to the king to seek the king's intervention, Mordecai's still confident that the Jewish people will be saved.

And so Esther's got to reflect on really why she's where God has given her to be an influence for good. Esther's got to reflect on why she's there. And you see that reference that Mordecai gives, that makes before Esther, that God has chosen Esther to be where she is.

[23 : 47] She's in that palace. She's in that place of the king's presence for such a time as this. So Esther's been told in no uncertain times that to be silent at that critical moment, to be silent is a sin.

And, you know, we've got to realize, each one of us, we have been given words to speak for the Lord Jesus. We can't be silent when evil prevails. We can't be silent when evil is seen and pervades so much of our land. Evil has its way when we remain silent.

How many times have you, how many times have I remained silent when we ought to have said a word for the Savior? How many times have we kept our mouths shut when we ought to have spoken and taken that stand for the sake of the gospel? How many times have we not reflected on the truth that God has placed you where he has for his glory, for the sake of his gospel?

[25 : 00] God's given you life at this time in the history of the world. You were born at a particular time to live in a particular place. Yes, at such a time as this, at such a time when the world needs to hear the voice of truth from Christian believers, you who love the Lord and you who love his word.

And it's for you to communicate that truth, to communicate the message of the gospel, even through the various channels that God in his providence has given to us, even at this time. And may it then be that the Lord's church isn't going to be hesitant in using the channels that God has given us to serve him.

Even the various media that we have, even when the media works, that God has given to us to broadcast the truth of God's word, to broadcast the truth of the gospel. God has given us these means to witness for him, to speak for him, to shine for him. And so let's not be ashamed to use the opportunities that God has given us to speak a word for the Savior.

[26 : 16] And yes, to go forward in faith, in fearless faith, as we'll see in Esther and her fearless faith from faint-heartedness to fearless exercising faith in the one true God.

So tell the world, speak to the world, tell the world even of what's happening at the moment in the current circumstances that we're living in in this constant aspect of our coronavirus. Tell the world, yes, of the fragility of that virus, but the fragility of life, the fragility of life lived through these times. But at the same time, to tell the world that we have a God who's eternal. We trust in God in whom is life eternal. And that for you who give your life to him, you have that promise of eternal life.

Mordecai didn't hold back in speaking a word for God. It's not for any of us to hold back in speaking that word for our Savior. Mordecai even towards Esther spoke the truth in love.

[27 : 27] Even when Mordecai's words might have seemed harsh towards Esther, whom he loved as his beloved cousin. You know, there are these times that we're living in.

We've got to speak the truth in love. There are these times when we need to speak the truth in love to our family members, to relatives, to friends. Even telling them, warning them of the judgment to come for those who won't bow in heart before the one true God. We're living in urgent times.

The times that Mordecai and Esther were living in were urgent times. And, you know, we see how Mordecai, in his emphasis, just how urgent these times were, that he's calling on Esther to use her God-given position to intervene for the sake of our people.

And, well, in our final verses that we read in 15 to 17, we see Esther's full-hearted response, a full-hearted response to her responsibilities in intervening for the sake of our people.

[28 : 40] Because if Mordecai has been the driving force, well, humanly speaking, the driving force, getting to this very point where action has to be taken to save the Jews, if it's been Mordecai up to this point, it's Esther who now takes the lead.

She's the one on whose shoulders the responsibility lies to make the difference. And you see her plan, her plan to effect the difference, to make the difference.

This plan concerns wisdom, even though God's name is not mentioned. We can infer from the word of God, from the passage, that her actions involve waiting on God, waiting on God through fasting, that exercise of self-discipline that was accompanied by prayer, that wholehearted dependence on God.

You see that in Esther's actions because she needs that wisdom, that God-given wisdom to rescue the Lord's people. She knows that the stakes are high.

She knows that she may well perish in her attempt to do great things for God, but she's now fully resolved, fully resolved, having that full-hearted response, that full-hearted commitment to do what's right.

[30 : 00] And that full-hearted response of Esther and her full-hearted commitment to serve God, well, surely that has to be an encouragement to you and to me when so often we can be so downhearted, even at times, even tempted, as we would say nowadays, to throw in the towel, to throw in the towel and, you know, when we can be so discouraged, even when God gives us particular work to do and in our own feeble way of thinking, we can think that that work is just too much for us to accomplish.

But when that happens, take heart. Esther didn't remain in her indecisive condition. Esther took action. Esther had that renewed heart that truly sought to honour God.

And as God willing, we'll see next week, she was rewarded for her faithfulness. And so it's for you and for me to remain steadfast in her commitment to serve God.

Yes, there's a cost to discipleship. There's a cost of discipleship. If you follow the Lord Jesus, there is that cost, that cost of service. But you follow the Lord Jesus who gave himself fully and completely and did that for your sake.

You follow the Lord Jesus who didn't look to his own interests when he came from heaven to earth.

You follow the Lord Jesus who gave himself fully and wholly and completely.

[31 : 41] Even the Lord Jesus is aware of the cost of the salvation that he'd come to accomplish. That salvation won for you by his death.

And so be encouraged. Yes, be encouraged in what we've seen of the commitment of Esther in her service for the Lord our God. But see the fuller and complete commitment of the Lord Jesus when he was faced, when Jesus was faced with the prospect of his suffering, when he declared even in prayer, he declared his Father, not my will, but your will be done.

And may that be your prayer even this evening when you come before God. You know, when God calls you in a particular work that he's given you to do, in a particular task that he's given you to perform, and perhaps you may be faint-hearted initially in your response, indecisive.

No. Call upon God in prayer. Commit to him with the words of the Lord Jesus, not my will, but your will be done.

Amen. And may God be given the praise. Let's pray. O Lord, our God, our loving Heavenly Father, you who have blessed us in every, every aspect of our lives, may it be, Lord, that we return to you thanksgiving and do as you have called us to do in service to your name.

[33 : 17] May it be, Lord, even in this week that has begun and we see before us the works that you've given us to do, the tasks that you've been given us to perform. May we know, Lord, that we do as we do, as unto the Lord and not to men.

Strengthen us, we pray. Strengthen us by your word. Encourage us by your truth that we might serve you with all our heart. Continue with us now, Lord, we pray as we close in our final psalm. For before us, we pray in all things. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.