

ESTHER

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- [0 : 0 0] two guys in their mid-20s tried to get tickets for a sold-out Metallica concert in the US. That was probably their first mistake. Having failed in getting the tickets to their concert to go and see their heroes, they decided instead to hang out in the venue car park drinking alcohol.
- And so eventually, fueled by alcohol, they decided that they would take a risk. And the plan was to jump the two-metre fence and to sneak into the back of the concert.
- However, the fence on the car park side was two metres. What they didn't realise was on the other side was a seven-metre drop below the two-metre fence. And so something that they couldn't see, obviously, in the darkness.
- And so the first guy jumps over the fence, falls about halfway down the distance, and lands in this large tree which broke his fall and his left arm. He also somehow managed to get his shorts stuck in a tree branch, and so he was dangling there in his shorts with his broken arm.
- And it was at that point that he remembered he had a pocket knife. Rips out his pocket knife and decides to cut his shorts free. In the moment of cutting his shorts free, he dropped the knife, and he fell through the rest of the tree and landed on some pretty hard concrete, some branches of some concrete down the bottom, which broke his fall.
- [1 : 3 2] But he also landed on his knife that he dropped, which stabbed him in his left thigh. His mate decides to attempt a rescue.
- Throws a rope over the fence, ties his mate up, or gets his mate to tie himself up. Tries to pull him up, but he's too heavy. It's at this moment he has a stroke of genius, and decides to tie the other end of the rope to his pickup truck.
- And because of the level of alcohol in his system, he put it into the wrong gear. He put it into reverse, drove through the fence, over the tree, and landed on his mates, which killed him instantly.
- He himself was thrown out of the vehicle and died from internal injuries not much longer after that. Now, risk is any action that exposes you to loss or injury.
- That's what risk is. If you take a risk, you can lose money, you can lose face, you can lose your health, or you can lose your life. And what's worse, if you take a risk, you may in fact be endangering other people and not just yourself.
- [2 : 4 9] That's risk. And so would a wise and loving person ever take a risk? Is it loving to endanger others?
- It depends. You can throw your life away in a hundred sinful or stupid ways, like trying to secure tickets for a Metallica concert, and you can die as a result of it.
- But losing your life is not the same as wasting your life. What if successful risk brought enormous benefit to many people, and its failure would cause harm to only you?
- It may not be loving to choose comfort or security when something great may be achieved for the cause of Christ or for the sake of other people.

And that's where we find ourselves in Esther today. As we saw last week in chapter 3, Edict goes out to the whole Persian Empire about the extermination of the Jews on a set date.

[4 : 08] And on that day, if you're a Jewish person in the Persian Empire, your next-door neighbour, your school friends, your work colleagues are given permission by law to, as it says in chapter 3, verse 13, to destroy, to kill, and annihilate you and plunder all of your goods.

And so at the beginning of chapter 4, as Deb just read out, Mordecai is in sackcloth and mourning at the open square of the city in front of the king's gate because of this edict. It says, When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, he put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the city wailing loudly and bitterly.

Now, if I was Mordecai, I've got to say, I'd be feeling a little bit responsible at this moment. This all transpired because I refused to give acknowledgement to Haman.

Who could have predicted it would have gone this bad? Feeling a little bit responsible. But here's Mordecai. He's at the palace gate, chapter 1, verse 2.

He calls it the citadel of Susa. It was a strongly fortified, elevated position in Susa and it was all designed to exalt the importance of the king and to guard his person.

[5 : 35] So this is Mordecai. He's at the gate of the palace complex, the high city. It's the palace. It's the citadel and it's the place of power and influence for the whole Persian empire.

And this is where Esther is. She's on the other side of this gate and Mordecai is trying to get her attention to do something about this situation, to save the people of God.

Now the first thing we learn here is that God doesn't just work using missionaries and ministers and church workers for his work in the world.

Esther's not head of a congregation. She's not even in a congregation. She's not even out in the streets. She's here in the palace. And this, of course, is the problem with Esther at the beginning of this chapter.

There is a danger of being in the palace. Notice Esther's response to Mordecai's weeping in verse 4. When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress.

[6 : 43] Why was she in great distress? Well, we know. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth. But he would not accept them.

She was in great distress because he'd torn his clothes. And so she sends him clothes. Maybe he's making a spectacle of himself. Esther has become totally isolated from the rest of God's people.

Every Jew from Ethiopia to India knew about this edict. Except Esther, it would appear. She didn't have a clue.

Maybe she didn't have time between the manicures and the pedicures and the facials. Maybe it was the shopping. In any case, she'd done a really good job at concealing her identity and so who would bother to inform her that her people are about to be executed?

How easy it is to become isolated from the needs around us and for God's concerns for his world when we live the good life in the palace.

[8 : 03] And Mordecai here begs her, he pleads with her to use her clout and her position and her faith with the king to do something, to work for justice and to save her people.

Notice Esther's first response to Mordecai in verse 11. All the king's officials and the people of the world provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned by the king has but one law, that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives.

But 30 days have passed since I was called to go to the king. She says there's risk here. Mordecai, there's risk.

Now let's not forget that this is the Esther who got to where she was because her predecessor was a little too bold. Remember what happened to Vashti?

And notice too that Esther says that Xerxes hasn't asked her to come to her for 30 days.

[9 : 27] It's not like there's a bunch of stuff on Netflix that he's trying to watch. This guy does not sleep alone. And so if she has not been called for 30 days, then it could possibly be a sign that she is out of favour with Xerxes.

So she says to Mordecai, you don't know what you are asking of me. I could lose everything. And Mordecai sends back a message in verse 13 which is the high point of all of Esther.

Esther. This chapter 4 is the main chapter in Esther and this is the high point of the chapter. Do not think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape.

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place. But you and your father's family will perish.

And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this. In other words, if you don't risk losing the palace, you will lose everything.

[10 : 54] If you risk losing the palace, you might lose everything but if you don't risk losing the palace, you will lose everything.

If all the Jews were killed, then you'll eventually be sniffed out and you'll be discovered as a Jew and you will die too. And if the Jews aren't killed, there's some other one who comes in and rescues by God's hand, then you'll just be discovered as a traitor.

Now, we're not in the identical situation as Esther here. Let's be clear about that. But it might be helpful just to stand back just for a moment and generalise a little for a moment.

I think there are two remarkable principles that have powerful applications for us. First, first principle here, unless you use the cloud that you've got, the credentials you've got, the money you've got, the position you've got, the skills you've got, for the service of others, rather than feathering your own nest, then those things don't become freeing for you, they become enslaving.

That's the first principle. the palace was in fact death row for Esther if she used it for her own comfort and her own security.

[12 : 25] If you're unwilling to jeopardise your place in the palace, then the palace has ownership of you. It has taken over you. The only way that you're prepared to risk life in the palace is if your identity has its foundation somewhere else.

That is, something other than your net worth becomes your self-worth. Mordecai seems to be saying here that if you can't throw away the palace, or at least risk throwing away the palace, or risk your place in the palace to do good for other people, then the palace actually owns you.

You don't own the palace. So how do you get an identity that hasn't got its foundation in the palace? And the answer is actually hinted at in these verses.

Remember those words he said, who knows, but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? The word come there is in the passive form, which means it's probably a little bit better to translate it like this.

Who knows, but that you have been brought to the royal position for such a time as this? He's saying that you got to the palace by grace.

[14 : 05] your beauty was not something that your beauty was something that was given to you. She didn't produce the door of opportunity that saw her rise from orphan girl to queen.

God has been silent but sovereignly working to this point. Now, although it's a general statement from Mordecai, Esther begins to respond to this message here.

The Esther that we know from chapters one and two, the sweet, the pretty little Esther, who was compliant, who never rocked the boat, who doesn't ruffle any feathers, goes away from this moment and starts to give orders.

It's Mordecai giving the orders at the beginning of the chapter, it's now Esther who starts giving the orders. And this is the turning point for Esther.

This is where she steps up. This is where she utters those remarkable words in verse 16. Go gather all together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me.

[15 : 15] Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. And when this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.

And if I perish, I perish. We go from Barbie doll sex kitten Esther to the one who's living the high life in the palace to Esther risking everything.

Esther the hero. hero. What an inspiration. Let me just pause again there for a moment because there is a danger here as well.

There's a danger that some of us might be so inspired by Esther as can I say many feminists are inspired by Esther to get out there and do something and make change for good.

If you're inspired by Esther, that is, some here might stop seeing all that God has given them for their own benefit, feathering their own nest and for their own self-gratification and start instead to use everything that God's given them for a means to serve others.

[16 : 41] You might start to take risks and get more interested in justice and mercy and mission and others might be interested by Esther just to start speaking up and speaking your mind and confronting the issues.

Maybe you've been too quiet about your beliefs, you've been afraid to speak, you're in the background, most people don't know who you are so now, come Monday morning, I'm on the front foot and I'm just going to let people have it. There's a danger in this and the danger is it won't last.

The danger is that if you get inspiration by an example, even an example like Esther, then your basic motivation is guilt.

Guilt because of a past life of selfishness, oh my goodness, I've been living so poorly and I've got to all change now, I feel so selfish from where I've been.

It might be guilt over elitism, it might be guilt because I live in a really nice part of a city in a great country. Motivation by guilt wears off because guilt doesn't actually change you on the inside.

[17 : 54] Changes actions on the outside but doesn't change you on the inside. When guilt is your motivation, then you are still going to get your identity from your performance.

performance. When guilt is your motivation, you still get your identity from your performance. And self-righteousness is always the fruit of performance.

I'm not going to be like those other so-called Christians who don't give a rip about justice and mercy. I'm going to lead the way in this. I'm going to be principled and I'm going to be outspoken.

It's not actual change in the heart and it's revealed that when you're confronted by others who don't have the same values that you have, you get angry with them.

You become judgmental. That's the outworking of self-righteousness. And there is another danger here and that's overreaction.

[19 : 02] This is where you give everything away, go home right now, right now, out all the checks, get everything and put on sackcloth and mourning and go and sit in the mall. You do anything, give away everything without any thought, any wise stewardship.

Now, let me say, there is a time to throw a band in the air and there are also times to pull back and to regroup. You know, let's be clear here, it took Esther a little while before she actually approached Xerxes and when she did approach Xerxes, he had to ask her three times what her request was.

Three times. It's almost like she's about to say it, come to dinner. You see that in chapter 5.

My point is if you just look at Esther as an example, it will wear off or you'll become more and more self-righteous and more pharisaical or you'll just become stupid if you just look at her as an example.

But what if you didn't just look at Esther as an example but saw her as a signpost? Esther saved her people by two things, by identification and by mediation.

[20 : 28] Identification and mediation. She identified with her people. She didn't take the safe way. Her people were condemned and she identified with them and in fact came under the same condemnation.

She risked her life and she says if I perish, I perish. And because she identified with her people, she could mediate. She could go before the throne of power in a way that no one else could.

She went before the throne of power and because she was favoured, that favour was attributed to her people or imputed to her people.

She saved her people through identification with them and mediation for them. Now Esther was a flawed saviour, a very flawed saviour, but she points us to a far greater saviour.

Jesus lived in the ultimate palace, the very presence of God in the kingdom and as the son of God he had ultimate beauty and glory and he left it. No one had to manipulate him, no one put pressure on him, no one had to convince him for it, he wasn't getting pedicures and manicures and facials, he wasn't backed into a corner, Philippians 2 says that he had equality with the father but he did not hold on to it, he emptied himself, became down, he identified with his people, he took on their condemnation, he didn't do it at the risk of his life, he did it at the cost of his life, he didn't say if I perish I perish, he said when I perish, I perish, he went to the cross, there he died and made atonement for our sins and now the Bible says that he stands before the throne of the universe and his favour is our favour in front of the king of kings, the lord of all the world.

[22 : 36] You see if, you see Esther as an example and say be like Esther, it will crush you because you could never do it.

But if you see Jesus as your saviour, not as an example doing something for someone else, but as a saviour rescuing you, it changes your identity.

He becomes your security, he becomes your value, he becomes your worth and suddenly everything else in your life just becomes stuff because you've got everything when you've got Jesus.

you're set free to risk stuff, you're set free to lose stuff because your self-worth is not your net worth and when you lose stuff in Jesus, you don't lose yourself.

If you see what Jesus has done for you in losing the ultimate palace for you, then and only then will you have the freedom to risk for God's glory in the sake of others.

[23 : 54] When you see Jesus risk for you, there are at least four implications for that. At least four. So let me go through them. Firstly, if I perish, I perish is the language that's calling you, Christian person to identify with the poor and the oppressed in this world.

Just like Esther did, identifying with her people, those in great desperate need. So if I perish, I perish is the language calling you, Christian person, to identify with the poor and the oppressed in this world.

If this is a call for us as believers, having seen what Jesus has done for us to identify with the people who are outside the palace. Scottish minister Robert Murray Mishane preached this message to Scottish Christians living in Scottish cities in 1838.

He said, I fear that there are some Christians among you to whom Christ will not be able to say on the last day, well done, good and faithful servant.

[25 : 07] He's referring there to Matthew 25. Your hearty dwelling rises amongst thousands who have scarcely a fire to warn themselves at and have but little clothing to keep out the biting frost and yet you don't darken their door.

You heave a sigh, perhaps at a distance, but you do not visit them. My friends, I'm concerned for the poor, but I'm actually more concerned for you.

I don't know what Christ will say to you on the great day. You say you follow Christ, but you don't care for his poor. I fear that there may be many hearing me who now know well that they may not be Christians at all because they don't love to give.

To give largely, and generously, not begrudgingly, requires a brand new heart. An old heart would rather part with its lifeblood than its money.

Oh, my dear Christians, if you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely to the vile and the poor and the thankless and the undeserving.

[26 : 32] Christ is glorious and he is happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want but your happiness.

Remember his word. It is more blessed to give than receive. That's the first bit of if I perish, I perish.

Secondly, if I perish, I perish is the language of exciting mission. Wherever you are right now, you've got certain gifts, certain abilities, certain experiences, certain opportunities, certain experiences even of hardship and suffering that make you uniquely ready, uniquely ready to help certain people in this world that no one else can help.

Ephesians 2 verse 10 says that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do.

And the word workmanship there carries the idea of the original root meaning is poem. It's where we get our word poem from. And the idea is that we are God's artwork.

[27 : 53] We have been uniquely crafted by God with gifts and talents and positions and strengths and weaknesses, even weaknesses and blessings and sufferings that make us uniquely placed by God to do unique works for other people.

Every one of us. You've been brought to whatever place you've been brought to for such a time as this. Ask God what it is.

Ask God what it is. Thirdly, if I perish, I perish is the language of unconditional obedience. It means I'm going to follow God whatever happens.

And it's really essential for us to understand who it is that's calling us to unconditional obedience. Imagine the distance between the earth and the sun, approximately 149.6 million kilometers, is represented by the thickness of this sheet of paper.

that represents 149.6 million kilometers. The distance between the earth and the nearest star to earth is, would, a stack of paper like that, 360 reams of paper high.

[29 : 34] that's the distance from the earth to the nearest star. That's about a 20 meter high stack of paper. The distance across the little galaxy that we exist in would require 3.456 million stacks, reams of paper.

That's a stack of paper, I think, roughly 192 kilometers high. This universe is but a little speck amongst all the, this galaxy is a little speck amongst all the other galaxies in our world, our universe.

It's pretty impressive when you consider this is the thickness between here and the sun. Frankly, the sun wasn't close enough this morning to us. And the point is that Hebrews 1, 2 and 3 says that this Jesus is the one who spoke it all into existence and he's the one who upholds it by the power of his word.

Or another way, my translation, he holds it up by his pinky. This is the Jesus who calls you to unconditional obedience. This is the one who calls you to unconditional obedience.

This is the one who gave his life for you. He's not your personal assistant. He doesn't fit with your program and follow you when you can fit him in.

[31 : 20] You don't RSVP with Jesus and wait for a better offer. friends, take your hands off your life because you don't have control of it anyway.

You don't have control of it. It seems to me that God intends for us to live with uncertainty and risk in our lives, whether we're Christian or not. James 4 verses 13 to 15 says this, now listen, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money, why you don't even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.

You don't know, frankly, friends, if your heart is going to stop before this meeting is over. You don't know if some oncoming driver will swerve on the wrong side of the lane and hit you on the way home.

You don't know if the food that you've eaten this morning is some sort of wicked bacteria and virus thing in it that's going to kill you. You don't know if a man with a gun is going to shoot you down the mall in Chatswood before the afternoon's over.

[32 : 49] We are not God. we do not know what tomorrow is and risk, therefore, is built into the very fabric of our lives. You cannot avoid risk even if you wanted to avoid risk.

All of our plans for tomorrow's activities can be shattered by a thousand unknowns. Whether we stay at home in bed or we walk along a footpath, we need to explode the myth of safety and to somehow be delivered from the seduction of security that exists in our culture.

It's a mirage. Security doesn't exist. Don't listen to the retirement ads. It doesn't exist.

And the tragedy is that in the myth of security we are paralyzed to take any risk for the cause of Christ because we are deluded and we think it will jeopardize the security that doesn't exist.

Take your hands off your life and put them into his pinky. fourthly, if I perish, I perish is the language of greatness.

[34 : 23] There are 14 times in the book of Esther where Esther is referred to specifically as Queen Esther. 13 of the 14 times occur straight after she says, if I perish, I perish.

she becomes a person of greatness by letting go of her life and placing it in the hands of God for his glory and the joy of all others.

If I perish, I perish. perish. It's the language of risk. It's the language of greatness. It's the language of greatness.