

## GOD'S SUPER HEROES - ESTHER

God's superheroes – part 8 (ESTHER)

In the film, “Castaway,” Chuck Noland is a FedEx systems engineer whose personal and professional life are ruled by the clock. Chuck's manic existence abruptly ends when, after a plane crash, he becomes isolated on a remote island - cast away into the most desolate environment imaginable. Stripped of the conveniences of everyday life, Chuck begins his true personal journey. After four years, fate gives Chuck a chance to fight his way back to civilization, only to find an unexpected emotional challenge which is far greater than physical ones he was faced with on the island

*Clip*

In the film clip we have just seen Chuck has to make some very hard decisions in his life. Does he go on, or does he give up? Today in our study of God's superheroes, we take a look at the life of a young woman named Esther. The whole story revolves around a very hard decision that Esther has to make. It is a decision that involves not only her life but also the life of the entire Jewish nation.

The book of Esther reads like a short story. The main characters in this powerful drama are King Xerxes of Persia; his wife Queen Esther, his second in command, Haman and Mordecai, a leader among the Jewish people who are scattered throughout the Persian Empire and the cousin and adopted father of Esther.

Sometimes, when we're reading the Old Testament, we get a little confused about the time and place of the story that we're reading. Let me give you a little background on how this takes place. When we studied Daniel, we saw that Daniel was taken away into captivity to Babylon as a young man, and he stayed there for the rest of his life. After some time, the Babylonians were defeated by the Medo Persians which put the Jews under a new government. It was during that time that the story of Esther is told.

### **A LOOK AT SOME OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN ESTHER'S STORY.**

#### **1. AN EGOTISTICAL KING NAMED XERXES**

The year was 465 B.C. A man named Xerxes was king of Persia, and he was the most powerful man in the world. His empire was even bigger than the empire of

Nebuchadnezzar. The story of Esther takes place in his capitol city called “Susa,” and it all begins with Xerxes throwing a party that lasts 6 months.

*Esther 1:1-4 This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: 2At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, 3and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.*

*4For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.*

At the end of this huge display of wealth, he had a final 7 day party/drinking binge for the common people. During this time, the king decided to call for his wife, Queen Vashti to come in and display her beauty before the people at the party. The problem was the queen refused to come, and the scripture says “the king became furious and burned with anger.”

Here is the most powerful man on earth trying to show off all his wealth and power, and he can’t even get his wife to come to his party. The king was really upset. Xerxes asked his advisors what could be done. Their answer is given in verses 19-20.

*Esther 1:19-20 Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. 20Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”*

That is exactly what the king did. The king is an example of a powerful man who controlled everything but himself. Vashti was kicked out, and the whole kingdom was searched for beautiful young women to come and make their bid for the throne. We could call this search “Who Wants to Marry A King?” There were about 400 girls chosen, and Esther was chosen to be the new queen.

## **2. AN EVIL MAN NAMED HAMAN AND A GOOD MAN NAMED MORDECAI**

*Esther 3:1-2, “After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.”*

Mordecai was the cousin and adopted father of Esther. As a loyal Jew, he understood that worship belonged to God alone. Haman finds out about Mordecai's refusal to kneel down to him, and he was furious. His intention was not just to kill Mordecai; he wanted to exterminate the entire Jewish race.

*Esther 3:8-9, "Then Haman said to King Xerxes, There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."*

Haman got the king to agree to his plan, and a time was set to exterminate all the 15 million Jews in the kingdom. Those were dark days for the Jewish people. Can you imagine living in the misery of knowing what awaited you and your family? Every day that passed brought you closer to the massacre that was going to happen in your home. You could picture Persian soldiers bursting into your home and killing your little girl with a sword.

Just as a footnote, this whole problem was a result of king Saul's disobedience to God many years before. Haman is described here as an Agagite. If you know your biblical history, you know that King Saul was told by the prophet Samuel to kill all the Amalekites.

But Saul disobeyed God and spared the king of the Amalakites, Agag. The Agagites, descendants of the Amalekites, got their name from Agag. This is an illustration of how serious it is to obey God. Your disobedience has the power to bring problems in the lives of our children, our grandchildren and those who follow.

### **3. A GODLY YOUNG WOMAN FACED WITH A DEFINING DECISION**

When Mordecai heard what wicked Haman had done, he went to the middle of the city and clothed himself with sackcloth and ashes and began mourning and wailing. Word of what Mordecai had done reached the ears of Queen Esther, and she sent her messenger to find out what had happened. He gave the messenger a copy of the decree and said, "Go back to the queen and tell her that she is the only one who can save us now. If she does not act we will all die."

Esther sent back a message reminding Mordecai of the fact that no one, not even her, could approach the king without being called for. If someone did approach the king, he would be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life.

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer which may be the most well-known statement in the book:

*"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 royal position for such a time as this?" (4:12-14).*

Mordecai is saying, "Esther, how do you think you got where you are? Do you think it was your beauty? There were other beautiful girls there. Do you think it was your smile? There were others that could smile, too. Do you think it was because of you that you were raised to that high position? No, it was God who has placed you there. God has done it so that at this very moment you can deliver your people. Esther, all your life up until now he has been leading you to this place."

What Mordecai said to Esther is true of every one of us. Sometimes it seems like we are no more than a faceless number. In God's plan, there are no unimportant people.

Even in earthly things, one person is important.

In 1645, one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of England.  
In 1649, one vote caused Charles I of England to be executed.  
In 1776, one vote gave America the English language instead of German.  
In 1839, one vote elected Marcus Morton Governor of Massachusetts.  
In 1845, one vote brought Texas into the Union.  
In 1875, one vote changed France from a monarchy to a republic.  
In 1876, one vote gave Rutherford B. Hayes the United States presidency.  
In 1923, one vote gave Adolph Hitler control of the Nazi party.  
In 1941, one vote saved the Selective Service System just 12 weeks before Pearl Harbor

In the same way, sometimes 1 godly person can make the difference in the lives of many people.

*Esther 4:15-16, "Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

There are two things seen here in this young woman's life. First, she asks for prayer. If God is going to do what He is going to do, why do we need to pray? The answer is that's just the way God designed things to be. God's method is asking and receiving. One of the main reasons the church is so weak today is the fact that we are so prayerless. We often don't have because we don't ask.

The second thing that I see in Esther's statement is her commitment. She says "I will do what I need to do to save the people, and if I die I die." I told you in an earlier sermon that beliefs are what you talk about, and convictions are what you're willing to die for. Esther was a young woman of conviction who was willing to die for her faith. What happened when Esther went into the king without being called?

*Esther 5:1, "On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.*

The king raised his scepter and accepted her. The rest of the story is bizarre. Shortly after that the king had a night when he could not sleep. To entertain himself, he called for the record books of how things have transpired in his kingdom and found that his life had actually been saved by Mordecai the Jew. When he found out that Haman was trying to kill the very man who had saved his life, he had Haman executed for his wicked plot. The Jewish nation was saved from annihilation. And Mordecai became the number two man in the kingdom. What a great ending to Esther and Mordecai's story!

## **LINGERING LESSONS**

### **1. God is at work in our lives, even when we can't see Him at work.**

Scholars have pointed out that God's name is not even mentioned in this little book of the Bible and that's true, but His sovereign actions are everywhere! I like how Matthew Henry puts it: "...though the NAME of God be not in [Esther], the FINGER of God is directing many minute events for the bringing about of His people's deliverance."

The crucial, pivotal parts of the story are not just coincidences. They are God at work! Someone has defined a "coincidence" as "a miracle for which God chooses to remain anonymous" and that is certainly seen in this book! We often think that God is not involved in our lives because we don't see anything happening, but Esther's story shows us that God is just as active in the mundane things of life as He is in the miracles. He is behind the scenes of our life directing things.

In his book *Disappointment With God* Philip Yancey points out that humans can only see about 30 percent of the light spectrum whereas honeybees and homing pigeons can detect ultraviolet light waves that are invisible to us. And in the supernatural realm, our vision is even more limited. We get only occasional glimpses of that unseen world. But our not being able to see the activity of God doesn't mean He's not active.

## **2. LIFE IS FILLED WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE**

Chance may describe the mathematical probability of a throw of the dice or the spinning of a coin but it does not apply to people. Every one of us have been born into this time, and have been brought to this place for a reason, for some work that God has for us. The words that Mordecai spoke to Esther, the Holy Spirit speaks to us. You have been brought into the kingdom for such a time as this. You've been brought by God to the Kingdom to do something no one else can do, and your whole life has been the preparation for it. He has set the stage. It is now time for you to walk out on it!

## **3. THE COURSE OF YOUR LIFE WILL BE DETERMINED BY A FEW DEFINING MOMENTS**

Throughout our lives, we are faced with defining moments . Defining moments are decisions that we make that shape the rest of our lives. Adam and Eve's defining moment came in that split second decision they made to listen to the serpent and eat from the tree in disobedience to God's command. Think of the fallout from that one decision!

Abraham's first defining moment came when he obeyed God's command to leave everything that was familiar to him and take his family to a place he had never even seen.

Matthew, the tax collector, had a defining moment when Jesus walked by his tax booth and said, "Follow me!"

A defining moment came in my life one night when a young man shared the Gospel with me, and I received Christ. Another defining moment came when I decided to move to Dallas and met my wife.

Be ready for defining moments. Defining moments are not announced 2 weeks before they occur in order to give us time to get ready for them. Defining moments suddenly appear in the course of ordinary days.

Moses wakes up like any other day. No big deal. But on that day he would see a burning bush. A voice would come out from the bush, and his life would never be the same.

Defining moments are recognizable in hindsight, yet seldom are known for what they are at the time of occurrence. How do you know you have had a defining moment? One indicator is if you find yourself thinking back on a time when you had a choice of actions. In these remembrances you find yourself saying, "If only I had done the other option, things would be a lot different today."

### **3. WHEN ALL SEEMS LOST, IT ISN'T:**

If we were in speaking simply in human terms, I could not say that. I can say that all is not lost because God is in the picture. With God, it is never too late, and nothing ever goes too far for God to step in and change things. You may be having problems in your home, in your job, or you may be facing some inner conflicts. The good news is that there is a way out.

### **4. THERE IS NO GROWTH WITHOUT RISK**

The message of Esther is that if your life is to mean something, you must take risks by obeying God when it is scary to do so.

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells. It is very dangerous, but it is a necessary part of their growth process. While they are growing, they need their shells to protect their soft bodies from being torn apart by sharp rocks and eaten by other fish. But as they grow, they have to abandon their old shells. If they do not risk leaving their old shell, it would soon mean death for them. The risky part for the lobster is the brief period of time between when the old shell is discarded and the new one is formed. The lobster is very vulnerable during that period. The ocean currents push them into the coral. Hungry fish become predators. Sometimes a lobster dies before a new shell is formed, but if the lobster does not leave the old shell death is certain. Risk is a necessary part of survival. Doing God's will means that we follow him, we change, we risk leaving our comfortable shells in order to grow and obey God. Abraham risked leaving his homeland and going to a strange new place where God was calling him. Moses risked defying Pharaoh in order to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. David risked fighting Goliath. If you individually or if we as a church are going to move forward for God, it will always involve risk. God brings us again and again to face one basic question: "Am I willing to do God's will without regard to the consequences?"