

Such A Time As This • Esther 4:1-16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Are You Moving?*

1. Are you moving -or- sitting still?
2. Fact is, none of us is sitting motionless this morning - we are all moving
3. The geologist would tell us that due to continental drift, we here in California are moving NW at the rate of about 3½ inches per year.
4. The astronomer would remind us that we are spinning around at the rate of one revolution of the earth's axis every 24 hours,
 - a. and that besides this daily rotation we are also flying through space at an incredible rate to make one revolution around the sun every 365 ¼ days
 - b. our speed is about 12½ miles per second or 43,000 mph!
 - c. and that's to say nothing of the fact that our galaxy is hurtling through space at 375 miles per second or 1.3 million miles per hour!
5. Dizzy yet?
6. Just as we are hurtling through the heavens at unimaginable speeds, so too we are moving from here to eternity.
7. Our days and opportunities to live for the Lord pass so rapidly that we cannot afford to waste time.

B. *Opportunity*

1. I want to talk about "opportunity" today
2. With every day, come new opportunities
 - a. what are we doing with them?
 - b. do we recognize them for what they are?
 - c. do we take advantage of them?
 - f. or are we so caught up with the day to day, we miss the golden opportunities God gives us to make a difference?
3. Indeed, life goes on - and it passes quickly!
4. Let's not miss the great opportunities God brought us into being to meet!

II. TEXT

A. *Setting The Scene*

1. We're starting a new study this week - in the book of Esther
2. The reasons we'll be looking at Esther instead of jumping back to the NT book of 2 Corinthians is because Esther is part of a set piece with Ezra & Nehemiah which we have just studied
3. Esther takes place during the same time period
4. While Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the Jews who returned from the Exile, Esther tells the story of those who remained behind in Persia and Babylon

5. We'll go into more background on the book this Wednesday
6. But for our purposes this morning, let's get up to speed with where we are in chapter 4
7. Esther, a young Jewish woman, is now the queen of Persia
 - a. Vashti, the previous queen, had disgraced her office and Ahasuerus, the king, had put her away
 - b. a beauty pageant was then called to select a new queen, and Esther was chosen
 - c. up to this point, Mordecai, Esther's older cousin and guardian had counseled her to keep her Jewish identity a secret
8. But word reached Mordecai that Haman, second only to Ahasuerus in the kingdom, had hatched a plot to commit genocide on the Jews in the Persian Empire
9. The day was set for their destruction, and the king's seal had been given to the order
10. Under Persian law, once the king had set his seal to a law, it could not be changed, even by that same king
11. That's where we pick up the story now in chapter 4 . . .

B. Vs. 1-3

- {1} When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.**
- {2} He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.**
- {3} And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.**
1. The reason for their grief is obvious - it had become the official policy of the Persians to wipe out the Jews
 2. The holocaust would begin on a set day and wouldn't end till the last Jew was dead
 3. So the people turned to God for deliverance by dressing in sackcloth and ashes and pouring out their cries before Him

C. Vs. 4-5

- {4} So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*.**
- {5} Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. **
1. Word reached Esther in the palace that her cousin Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth
 2. This troubled her deeply because she knew it was a sign of intense grief but she didn't know what was bothering him
 3. Since Mordecai was like a father to her, she sent him a change of clothes so that he could come in to the palace and talk to her

4. But he refused to put them on - This bothered Esther even more and so she sent her servant to find out what was up

D. Vs. 6-9

{6} So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate.

{7} And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

{8} He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people.

{9} So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

1. Up to this point, Esther had remained ignorant of Haman's plot and the decree her husband the king had given his consent to
2. But Mordecai made sure she is fully informed as to the nature of the danger
3. After all, she was a Jew too
4. Mordecai sent Esther word that it was now time for her to reveal her heritage and ask the king to provide some means of help for her people
5. But it wasn't that easy for Esther . . .

E. Vs. 10-12

{10} Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai:

{11} "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days."

{12} So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

1. Even though Esther was the Queen, she did not possess the freedom to just walk in on her husband any time she wished
2. She could only go to him when she was called - and if she refused this call, as Vashti had discovered, she would be divorced!
3. The kings of Persia were total tyrants!
 - a. they were treated with the ultimate of respect and honor
 - b. their every whim was indulged by a vast staff of servants and officials
 - c. the luxury and splendor of the Persian court and kings is proverbial to this day!
4. Mordecai told Esther to go see Ahasuerus about the planned annihilation of the Jews
5. She replied that to do so would be equivalent to suicide
6. If she walked in to the royal presence without invitation, the policy was instant death!
7. The only exception would be if the King extended his scepter toward her, thus showing his invitation
8. Esther didn't see much hope of that since it had already been 30 days since he had called for her

9. Apparently Ahasuerus had been finding comfort in his harem!

F. 13-14

{13} And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews.

{14} “For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

1. Mordecai was a court official - he well knew proper court etiquette
2. He knew that there was danger in this move for Esther -
3. But *dangerous* times demand *daring* action
4. Yes, Esther might be executed for going to Ahasuerus, but she would certainly not escape the coming holocaust
5. Mordecai urged Esther to action by reminding her of something: The Jews were the covenant people of God
 - a. He might discipline them, as he had done with the Exile
 - b. but He would never abandon them
6. A deliverer would rise from some quarter, because God never leaves Himself without a witness
7. But who knows that God's first choice wasn't Esther
8. Indeed - who knows that Esther's miraculous selection to be the queen wasn't all a part of God's plan to bring her to the palace for just such a time and need as this?
9. Who knows but that Esther was born to be the deliverer of her people - that this was her hour!

G. Vs. 15-16

{15} Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai:

{16} “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!”

1. Mordecai's words have moved Esther - she will go to the king and speak to him about the need of her people
2. She is reluctant, but she will go
3. And if she dies in the attempt - so be it
4. Better to die doing what is right, than to live and be wrong

H. Esther's Opportunity

1. It's Mordecai's words to Esther in verse 14 I want to concentrate on today
"Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?"
2. He posed a question to Esther - one that she could not answer at that moment
3. But as we look back from this vantage point in history, we can say with all certainty - that is precisely why she was queen
4. God had brought her to the palace just so that she could intercede on behalf of her people and save them from destruction
5. And consider all the small and seemingly inconsequential events that reveal

- God's providence and control over the affairs of history to bring Esther to the palace
- a. there was Vashti's refusal to answer Ahasuerus' summons
 - b. there was Ahasuerus'; decision to put Vashti away
 - c. there was the suggestion by some unnamed counselor to hold a beauty pageant to select a new queen
 - d. there was Esther's selection to be a part of the pageant
 - e. then there's her decision to let the selection of her dress be made by one of the pageant officials, who picked a garment that just happened to be the perfect choice!
 - f. there's her winning of the pageant and marriage to the King
6. As Esther looked back, her life seemed almost like a fairy tale,
 - a. a luscious dream
 - b. the peasant girl who rises to the throne!
 7. But now, the dream has turned to a nightmare
 - a. death waits in the wings
 - b. and her world seems like it is about to come crashing down
 8. Then the idea comes to her in the words of her cousin -
 - a. "Maybe God has brought me to this time and place just so I could do something when no one else could."
 - b. maybe my life has been a strategic move of God to deliver my people
 - c. none of the things that have happened to me were luck or chance
 - d. God was directing my steps and nudging me into position for this day
 9. "So, what will I do? Now that I stand here and the need is before me - will I step out in faith and trust Him?"

I. Our Opportunity

1. It's my absolute conviction that what was true for Esther is equally true for every one of us in this room
2. I do not believe in chance - not as it relates to people any way
3. Chance may describe the mathematical probability of a throw of the dice or the spinning of a coin
4. But it does not apply to people - there is no chance involved in when and where we live and the purpose that God has ordained for our lives
5. You see, friends, every one of us in this room this morning have been born into this time, and have been brought to this place for a reason, for some grand work that God has us
6. The words that Mordecai spoke to Esther, the Holy Spirit speaks to us

Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Who knows? God does, and He wants you to know it this morning!

7. The kingdom this time is not the Persian kingdom - it's the Kingdom of God

- a. you've been brought into the Kingdom of God, not just so you could have eternal life - though you do
 - c. you have not been brought to the Kingdom just so that life would be one long spiritual thrill ride
 - d. you've been brought by God to the Kingdom to do something -
 - 1) something great
 - 2) something no one else could do
8. As you look back over your life this morning it may seem like a lot of coincidences and flukes that have brought you here
- a. the story of your conversion may look like a convoluted trail
 - b. your childhood may seem like little more than a tangled web of disjointed events
 - c. but I am here to tell you this morning that God does not work only in the lives of young Jewish women who end up becoming queens
 - d. He is your God - and your God is the God of History
 - e. not just the history that gets recorded in the textbooks and best sellers
 - f. He is the God of the history that is recorded by no one but the angels
 - 1) the daily record of your life that's inscribed in heaven
 - 2) YOUR history!
9. And God has brought you to this time and this place - FOR A REASON!
10. He has a special work for you to do
11. And your whole life has been the preparation for it
12. He has set the stage - it is now time for you to walk out on it!

13. Now, chances are, your calling is probably not to go and speak to President Clinton, but maybe it's to go and speak to the Local School Board
14. Maybe you cannot speak on the floor of the House of Representatives in Washington about the bill that is before them curtailing aid to regimes who persecute and kill Christians, but you can send a letter - and one of those letters will be the one that tips the scale and decides the vote that passes that legislation
15. Maybe you are one of the many who will never stand and speak before the seat of power, but your calling is to stand and speak to the people around you at school or at work
16. I do not profess to know what your calling is
17. But his I do know - you have been brought to the Kingdom for such a time as this
18. FULFILL YOUR CALLING - Step out on to the stage God has set for you
19. The curtain has risen - your mark has been set - go to it and say your lives in the great drama that is God's plan for the ages

J. What Hinders Us?

- 1. A brief examination shows how history swings around men and women who took advantage of an opportunity and rose to the occasion
- 2. One thinks of Abraham Lincoln

- a. his life seemed to be one long list of failures
 - b. he went bankrupt as a shop keeper
 - c. he was defeated in running for office not once but many times
 - d. but God eventually brought him to the office of President where he became the moral conscience of a nation that had been torn apart by civil war
 - e. and by the sheer force of his convictions, he saw the Union preserved and restored
 - f. he was a man who came at just the right time!
3. Then there's Winston Churchill
- a. here was a man who came from England's nobility
 - b. he lived a privileged life, one most people might think would make him soft
 - c. but Churchill was prepared by God to be a man who would almost single-handedly resist the juggernaut that was Nazi Germany
 - d. he stood in the place God had called him to and rallied the free world to stand against evil in one of the darkest times of human history
4. Here we are - at the end of history, when the battle between good and evil will reach it's apex
- a. the forces of antichrist are even now massing
 - b. they are preparing for the ascension of their master -a later day Haman who will unleash a holocaust of desolation on earth
 - c. God has called us as modern Esther's - to live at this time, in this place - to bring deliverance through the message of Christ
5. So, what hinders us from stepping on to that stage and fulfilling our call?
6. The same thing that, at first, hindered Esther - FEAR!
- a. the fear of failure - b. the fear of harm - c. the fear of stepping out in to the unknown
7. Many of us are simply over cautious -
- There was a very cautious man • Who never laughed or played.
He never risked, he never tried • He never sang or prayed.
And when he one day passed away • His insurance was denied -
For since he never really lived • They claimed he never died.*
8. One of the great disasters of history took place in 1271.
- a. in that year Niccolo and Matteo Polo (the father and uncle of Marco) were visiting Kubla Khan.
 - b. the Khan was at that time ruler of all China, India, the East.
 - c. he was attracted to the story of Christianity as the Polo brothers told it to him.
 - d. he said to them: "Go to your high priest and tell him on my behalf to send me a hundred men skilled in your religion and I shall be baptized, and when I am baptized all my barons and great men will be baptized and their subjects will receive baptism, too, and so there will be more Christians here than there are in your parts."
 - e. the Polos returned to their homes and brought word to the Pope, but nothing was done.
 - f. because of fear, no one went for about thirty years,

- g. and then, only three missionaries were found who would go - it was too few and too late
 - h. think what a difference to the world it would have made if in thirteenth century China, India, and the rest of the Far East had become fully Christian
9. Don't let the devil paralyze you with fear - step out
 10. After all, what do you have to lose? Your life?
 11. No, you can't lose that because God is keeping it in heaven!

III. CONCLUSION

A. *What's Your Business*

1. George Morrow of Morrow Computer Systems once gave an interview to *InfoWorld* magazine
2. He said:

"An article in the Harvard Business Review called 'Market Myopia' talked about how some people didn't understand what business they were in. For example, the railroad people didn't realize they were in the *transportation* business; they thought they were in the railroad business. Had they realized they were in the transportation business they would have invested in the airplane.

The telegraph people thought they were in the telegraph business instead of the communications business. In 1886 or so, they could have bought all the telephone patents for \$40,000. So obviously these people didn't know what business they were in."

"I used to think these guys were really dumb because they didn't know what business they were in. Then I asked myself, 'What business am I in?' I have yet to hear an intelligent answer to that question. I don't know what business I'm in."
3. Christian, have you ever stopped to ask yourself what business you're in?
 - a. no, I don't mean your career, your job, your occupation
 - b. I mean, your *vocation* - that's a good old English word which means your "calling"
4. Brothers & Sisters, I'll tell you what our business is - it's to Know God and to Serve Him in this generation!

B. *Redeem The Time*

1. In Ephesians 5, Paul writes . . . (15-16)

See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

- a. the word for "time" means "an occasion - opportunity"
 - b. Paul says that we are to "redeem" or buy up the opportunities God sends us
 - c. we're not to blindly float through life seeking the path of least resistance
 - d. rather, we're to walk circumspectly - we're to live with our eyes wide open, looking for the opportunities God has set all around us
2. In Chinese the word for crisis is made up of two characters -

- a. the first means *danger* and the second *opportunity*.
- b. hence a "crisis" is literally a "dangerous opportunity."
3. Life is filled with *dangerous opportunities* - risky moments when we can make a difference in other people's lives
4. Myron lived in a small town in the mid-west during the Great Depression.
 - a. he had a mild case of Downs Syndrome but there was no affordable place for him to stay
 - b. so he lived at home with his mother and they survived on the work that Myron did as a gardener.
 - c. Myron had a proverbial "green thumb," and the places where he did the gardening were easy to identify.
 - d. the lawns, shrubs, hedges, flowers--all showed care, skill, and loving attention.
 - e. Myron also did "volunteer" work, but it was of an unusual nature
 - f. you see, he cut grass, raked leaves, and planted flowers in what would otherwise have been unsightly vacant lots.
 - g. he was probably best known for the "oil can" he always carried in his hip pocket.
 - h. a squeaky door or hinge or gate always got a "free" dose from Myron's oil can.
 - i. every Sunday, Myron and his mother were in church
 - j. the boys teased him, but he always got the best of them because he refused to be anything but cheerful and full of good humor
5. When Myron died, it seemed that everyone in town had decided to attend the funeral
 - a. not only did the entire town turn out -
 - b. but there were scores of people who had traveled from distant places to be there.
6. Without consciously attempting to do so, Myron had patterned for us the kind of life that really matters.
 - a. he had not achieved *fame* or *fortune*
 - b. but he had achieved *honor* by being a man of honor
 - c. he had been a hard worker, a cheerful optimist, a practical helper
 - d. he had moved through life looking for opportunities to do good - and he left behind him a legacy of good that blessed others for years
7. I want to end today with the words of the hymn "Rise Up O Men of God."

*Rise up Oh men of God! - Have done with lesser things;
Give heart & soul & mind & strength, - To serve the King of kings.*

*Rise up oh men of God! - His kingdom tarries long;
Bring in the day of brotherhood - And end the night of wrong.*

*Rise up old man of God! The church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task, Rise up and make her great!*

*Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where His feet have trod;
As followers of the Son of Man, Rise up, oh men of God!*

Rise up old men of God!