

Esther 4-9

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[0 : 00] I'd like to read again the verses in Esther chapter 4, verse 15 and 16. And 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. Then this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law.

Well, if I perish, I perish. If I perish, I perish, she says. Now we're looking in the morning at such a time as this, so we're continuing almost where we left off, just to get an overview of this book very briefly.

And we were examining in the first place how Esther came into the royal position as such as this, and we looked at that in some detail. And then the time that was brought about was said basically due to Haman's pride.

And then another thing that we read in the morning that brought about this specific time that was nominated, you might recall from our reading in the morning and from the story itself, the time that was chosen for Esther to make this statement, if I perish, I perish, as she weighed up Mordecai's talk to her, was this time was elected through lots by Haman, an Agagite.

[1 : 36] They were very suspicious of this type of people, and that was the way that they decided things. They either threw some dice or had some way that they tried to decipher the future and what was best, what we would call superstitious nonsense.

And he had this belief in his lucky numbers. But as we have read, they weren't very lucky, were they? We were reminded of a proverb, a well-known proverb, but you find it in Proverbs 16.33. The lot is cast into a lap, but its every decision is from God. And that's exactly what we see here, how Haman was playing around with his lots, thinking that he was in control all the time, as the proverb reminds us, every decision is from God.

And we're reminded that we acknowledge that it's God that controls history. This, anyway, when Haman decided the date, as the edict goes out, we read in chapter 3, verse 12, I think it's in, that it was the 13th day of the first month.

Now, this is significant because if you go away back to Exodus, we know that on the following day, the 13th day of the month, on the 14th day of the month, would be the Passover.

[3 : 14] So, just before Passover, the 13th day of the month, the day before the 14th of Nathan, which is set in Exodus for the Passover, just before that day, the edict goes out, that the Jews are going to be slain.

And you can imagine the Jews there, they're getting prepared for the Passover, they're getting prepared to kill again a lamb, remembering their time in Egypt, they're going through that kind of ceremony, and thinking of how God delivered them.

And all that is going to happen the next day. And here, the edict goes out the day before the Passover.

So again, it's very significant that the timing of these things, the Jews would be looking towards Passover, remembering how God delivered them in Egypt, all these years ago, as they were getting in the lambs, preparing to bring them in.

They would remember, God delivered us before. And just the day before they were going to do that, this edict came, saying you're going to be destroyed. So I think even that would give them courage, remembering in their minds what they were going to do the following day.

[4 : 33] They would look back to their own history, as they were remembering the Passover, and thinking, this edict's going out, but what are we going to do tomorrow? We're going to celebrate the Passover.

And that is a reminder to us how God can deliver us through his mighty arm. So that was the day the edict went out.

But interestingly, when they threw the lot, it was 11 months away, giving the Jews plenty of time. The day that the lot was cast, was 11 months down the line. And so, that again, was significant.

So, when we think of Esther saying, if I perish, I perish, you've come to a time such as this, even as God is, Haman's trying to use lots, but as we said in Proverbs, here is God in control of even the very lots that were being cast.

[5 : 42] The lot is cast into the lap, but his heavy decision is from God. As we read the account of Esther, and as many of you know, many of you know the story of Esther, you know how it finishes, and we read how it finishes, with the edict going out.

Well, what we didn't read after that is what the Jews started, was called the Feast of Purim, which I think celebrated, I'm a little confused as to when it celebrated.

So either the very end of February, or the first days of March, maybe somebody can correct me to tell me when it celebrated. But it was celebrated quite recently, at the beginning of March, there.

And they're still celebrating this day of Purim, at this time of year. And it's been kept in the Jewish tradition to celebrate this day of Purim, which is another lottery day.

It was a day that was invented, not by God. God didn't demand of them to recall this day. Out of their own initiative, they decided to have this day called Purim, which would remind them of God's deliverance, of how God turned over the events.

[7 : 01] They were no longer victims, they were victors, and God had intervened in their situation. And if you read Esther chapter 9, you see it's a festival full of joy, full of celebration, full of food, full of thanksgiving, full of children asking questions.

And we know from some of the traditions, I don't know how many here know, about the festival of Purim, but I don't know a lot. So, I've been told that they act it out, that this festival of Purim, as somebody you might have heard, they even have a children's talk, as it were, as we would call it, a children's talk, where they have puppets, seemingly, and of course, one's puppet's Haman, and one's Mordecai, and they get the children to cheer at Mordecai, and boo at Haman, so I'm told. So, it's still, it's a very interesting festival, and it's a day that's used to celebrate, even today, remembering, the Jews are remembering this deliverance through this festival, how God overturned events of history, and intervened, because, although Haman cast a lot, as we said, it's every decision is from God, I'm reminded of another lot-casting event, and you remember how when Jesus was going to be crucified, he cast lots over his garments, and we don't, now, we don't, as it were, remember the festival of Purim, as people who follow the Lord, but we celebrate what's called the Lord's Supper, and what we remember is a greater deliverance than Purim.

You know, Purim is a wonderful festival, some of you might know, great, full of joy, because of this wonderful deliverance, as you read the book of Esther, that's full of joy, wonderful, as we saw the sovereignty of God, and how he turns events on their head, and Haman ends up in the gallows that he built for Mordecai, and how the Jews were given this edict, and so on, and that was a joy, the celebration they put into Purim, because of their deliverance.

Now, we who follow Christ, surely, we can experience, perhaps a similar joy, can we not, because of what Jesus has done. So, as you think of the lot being cast by Haman, think about the lot were cast over Jesus' garments.

[9 : 40] You know, he said, you know, the spear said, if I perish, I perish, but she never was asked to do that. Our Lord and Saviour said, if I perish, I perish, and he did.

He prayed about it, as you know, in the Garden of Gethsemane, with great drops of blood sweating off him, and yet, he did perish, for our sakes.

He was the one that delivered us from our, as it were, edict that is out upon us, as it were, because we have sinned. There's an edict over us, that we're under destruction, and God has rescued us from that edict, as it were, in providing a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who said, who gave up his life for us.

And that, if Purim, was a reason for the Jews to celebrate and rejoice at their deliverance, what I'm saying is look forward to another wonderful event where Jesus himself was the true deliverer, and surely Purim, with all its joy, pales into significance with the comparison of this deliverance that we think about today through Jesus dying for us.

So, Esther heard about this time from Mordecai. He was mourning, as we read, this morning, because of this edict that had gone out.

[11:10] And, as we read, Esther found out, because of Mordecai's mourning, he found out, she found out all what it was about.

And, she begins to explain the procedure of the court to Mordecai, saying that she couldn't just wander in to the king's presence, as it were, unannounced.

But, the end that did that would be put today and the only exception would be if the sector was going to be raised. And, but, so she, she realized that this was a dangerous thing to do and that's why we read these verses where she asked the people to fast for me and then she says if I perish, I perish.

And so, there was Esther as we saw in the morning and the place that she was placed by God, faced with this decision and what did she do?

Well, we have read it in these verses. The things that she did as she faced the decision, the first thing she did was fast. Go gather together all the Jews who are in Susan, fast for me.

[12:29] Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. So, that was Esther's approach to the situation.

She took time out to consider God's purposes for her. She took three days to fast. Now, just like it doesn't mention God in Esther, it never mentions prayer in Esther.

But as you go through scripture, fasting is never fixed, never hardly ever mentioned without prayer. prayer. And I think the time of fasting is a hint for us here to realize here was Esther spending time of reflection before God to see what God had in mind for her to do.

Making time for prayer as she did without food. And sometimes we need to abstain from anything that might interfere with our prayer life. It might not be food, it might be something else that we could do without, but we're tempted perhaps to watch an extra wee bit of television, we're tempted to lie in a bit longer and so on.

There's different things that can help our obstacles and interfere with our prayer life. And anything that interferes with our prayer life has to be dealt with.

[13:50] And this is what she dealt with. To make more time for prayer, she decided to do away with food. food. And as we read, we had just been feasting and everything.

So it was quite a dramatic change from feasting to fasting. And it would give her a whole load of time. Think of all the time that they prepared food.

And in these days, to prepare a meal and to eat it, people converse before the meal, then they converse how the meal was being served. And if you add up all the time, it was a long time they spent over meals.

And she was giving all that up. And that time could be better spent, she realized, trying to decipher what God had in mind for her to do. So she abstained from these things that interfered, I think, with her prayer life and showed that she was dependent upon God.

We read in Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse 29, we read these words. verse 30, but if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him.

[15:00] If you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul, when you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey Him.

For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with you forever, with your forefathers, which He confirmed to them by oath.

And so I think this is God here confirming again that He was their God and that she was showing like the passage we're reading here in Deuteronomy, she was showing that it says if from there you seek the Lord and I think this is what she was doing by fasting.

She was seeking the Lord, lamenting, crying out. That word lamenting often means to cry out in prayer. And then she said if I perish I perish.

She knew that her life is in God's hands and she knew that God is in control of her life and she knew it was time for her to take a risk.

[16:11] But she didn't do that until she spent three days in fasting, three days to take time out, three days to try to understand I think what God's will was for her and then she says if I perish I perish.

The time of preparation was over, the time to act was beginning. And I think this is a help to us. So often we can be preparing for things but never actually get around to do them. And I think it's significant that after a time of preparation then it was time to act. she was taking a list and God called her to take this risk if I perish I perish. And I think in our lifetime as you think of Esther here there's occasions when God wants us to step out as it were in faith but in our comfort zone Esther was queen. She had all that she wanted. She had everything. And if she took this step she was just going to change everything if it went wrong. She took time out and just made this decision she would take this risk.

[17 : 26] And what I'm saying to you sometimes in our own life that's what God wants to do for us. We've got times to stand back and realise that God wants to move on.

God wants us to move on. Perhaps he wants us to stay where we are but we've got to be aware that sometimes God wants us to take out of our comfort zones and to take this risk.

You see I was thinking recently I'm not going to give too much away but I'm in my mid-fifties now and I often think well is this what God wants me to do this work?

Is this what I'm meant to do? Or should I just launch out and do something different? It's difficult to know at times but this is the thing that we're challenged that God has given us gifts and time and sometimes we need just to take that courage and step out and say as you know we did that many years ago as missionaries many years ago and God blessed it and it's just a reminder tonight of Esther's willingness to put her life into God's hands and take the risk and offer her services to God and trust that he will do with her her faith gives her the courage to do what was demanded of her so in other words what we're seeing here of Esther is her willingness to commit herself wholeheartedly to God and to lay her life as it were on the line knowing that this was a moment of decision so we need to humble ourselves before him and seek him in fasting and prayer so that we too might become more assured of his will and as we then we can step out and say and of course she took that decision and we read what happened in chapter 5 when she went into the king's presence it just says very quickly before we know it we get over these the sentence that the king as it were held out his gold scepter that was in his hand and then it moves on it's almost passed by this wonderful event of the king holding up his scepter that Esther was accepted into his presence and it reminded me of our standing before

God remember I said in the morning about this is the king and compared that king to our king and here's Esther before this king being accepted because he presented her with the scepter and it led me to think well how can we be accepted before our king if we come into our king's presence as it were like Esther we take as it were move the step to go towards God how can we be assured that we will be accepted by our sovereign our God who is in control who is such a powerful God well we can be accepted and be assured that his scepter will be raised as we approach him if we come to Christ if we put our trust in Christ and come before his throne having closed ourselves in the righteousness of Christ then as it were he will raise his scepter and say you are accepted in my sight remember the parable in the new testament of the guests who were invited to the wedding and one person came to the wedding as you recall who wasn't wearing the proper garments and he was dealt with severely as you might recall and he wasn't allowed in because he didn't have the appropriate garment and it was a parable to teach us that if we are to be accepted into the presence of the king we must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ and then with confidence we can come before him knowing that he will raise his scepter and we'll be able to come before him because not because of our own righteousnesses but because we have closed ourselves in other words we have put our trust in Christ and we know that we have every confidence to come before our king because we have been justified by faith we have peace with

[22 : 01] God we have access by faith and we read in Revelation chapter 7 of a great number wonderful chapter in Revelation chapter 7 verse 8 onwards you read about that great multitude before the throne and it asks who are these and he said these are the ones who have been washed and they are the ones that are standing before the throne and the ones who are there are wearing white robes and they have clothed themselves in Christ's righteousness Revelation 7 shows us here is a multitude before the throne having been accepted by God because they have been made right in Christ and they asked tonight are we going to be there in that number where we're before the throne and accepted by God so we see that

Esther took this decision to come before the king and the scepter was presented in his hand and Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter and some of the other things now that developed from Esther's move she took the decision if I perish I perish and we see that she was accepted by the king now I just want to briefly go over some of the things that happened after she accepted that duty to go in to the king the first thing one of the things we see is the silence of Esther it's interesting in the morning we read about I touched upon Esther in chapter two she was told not to reveal her identity so she kept silent about her identity and as we read tonight in chapter five she didn't right away tell the king what she wanted she got the opportunity she had waited three days of preparation she was ready if I perish

I perish she was going in a high high blood level going through a rush of blood you can imagine going into the king's presence and she stays silent she doesn't tell him imagine the self discipline of her just before the king not blurting out what she wanted come to a meal and then even at the meal she says come to another meal and you see how she's delaying telling the king for some reason and we read how God used that delay because during these delays of the different feasts as we read we find the king couldn't sleep so it's remarkable that the silence of Esther and as I touched on earlier in chapter two she was silent about her identity here she was silent about what she really wanted until the right time so several times in the book of Esther you see this wisdom coming through when to speak when not to speak what to say what to do and this is our commission as well as people who follow as it were in Esther's footsteps the wisdom to know when to keep silent the right time to say something the right words to say and Esther seemed to have that insight and we pray to

God that we would have something of that wisdom of Esther as she is given that wonderful insight of when was the right time so the silence of Esther was used the silence of Esther and as I said the next thing that was used is the sleeplessness of the king the sleepless king I saw a film once called sleepless in Seattle I think it's called well this is sleepless in Susa the king couldn't sleep and as you know we read he had all these concubines he had musicians there were numerous ways he could have entertained himself to get to sleep but he chose to read the annals it's equivalent perhaps to you going to bed and opening up the blue book of the free church of Scotland it wasn't very interesting reading perhaps I shouldn't say that but it was something so boring usually that he would send the king to sleep that was the idea of going through but suddenly the very thing he read was about Mordecai and again you see how

God was working Esther between the two feasts Haman had been invited to one he was going to a second and in between the two this king has a sleepless night in the very book he takes up to try to get to sleep was this account of Mordecai and how he was used by God and how he rescued the king from these people who were trying to assassinate him and the king what's been done for Mordecai ask Haman he just happens to have arrived and again you see God's timing as Haman just came in at that moment so he consoled Haman and of course as we read he thought the honour was for himself and he related for all should happen and these wonderful words came out of the king's mouth well do that for Mordecai you can imagine

[27 : 55] Haman as it was jaw dropping as the king says that and so the silence of his stare was used the sleeplessness of the king and then the scoundrel was exposed and Haman was finally exposed the second banquet was called Haman was there and the queen was again asked what she wanted and now she tells and as I said earlier it's remarkable the timing in all this and of course the king's raging and goes out to the garden to cool off and we read how Haman tries to play for his life with Esther the queen throwing himself down at her feet and as you know something you should never do in these countries and of course the king comes in just for that inappropriate moment and covers Haman's face in other words he was going to head for execution and so we see that we're reading

Galatians he was about to reap what he had sown the scoundrel was exposed so we see how the scepter was extended Esther was accepted and then the silence of Esther was used and the timing and then the sleeplessness of the king was used and then scoundrel was exposed and then finally the salvation was discovered they rewrote this decree as we read in chapter 8 this decree was written and it was sent all over the provinces as we read in verse 14 of chapter 8 we read the couriers riding the royal horses raced out spurred on by the king's command and the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa so this edict was so important that the couriers got their royal horses to ride on and it says they raced out they spurred on by the king's command and they raced out to get

this edict out to all the people in the various places and because they had good news for them that they could protect themselves and they overcame many obstacles to get to these various people to tell them this good news and we were reminded that we have a greater good news have we not to tell people a greater deliverance that there is for them have we not got good news that we want to share with others about the deliverance that God has provided for in Jesus

Christ these couriers were delivering a message in very difficult conditions away past then the transport was difficult there was no A9s or anything they had all these difficulties yet they spurred on by the king's command they delivered this good news sure that we should be encouraged tonight to share with others the deliverance that has come our way the good news that Jesus Christ has provided for us and this is an encouraging thing our good news is that there is no condemnation for those in Jesus Christ and for those who have trusted their lives to Jesus Christ as we said they can confidently now stand before God and so in conclusion will each one of us make sure that God's scepter is stretched out as we approach him and we can do that tonight if we trust in

God's son who came just at the right time then we can have this confidence that we will be in that multitude that we read in Revelation 7 because we have put our trust in him may God are his blessing to these few thoughts shall we have a word of prayer Lord we thank you for the story of Esther we have looked at today we ask you to encourage us to know that there is a time such as this and we pray Lord that we would come to realise what wonderful good news that we have of the deliverance that you have provided so that we will be accepted into your sight we pray that each one of us would come to know your deliverance and having come to know it we would encourage others that we would go out with the good news the same eagerness and to spread the good news to others about this deliverance and we pray Lord that you would encourage us in this account of Esther and we ask this in Jesus' name Amen Amen