

Esther 1-4

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[0 : 00] I'd like to read again one verse from the verses we read together, the well-known verse in Esther chapter 4 verse 14. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, that 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.

Who knows but that you've come to a royal position for such a time as this. So the first thing I want to look at is how Esther came to this royal position.

In my introduction to chapter 3 after these events, I've already hinted at what had happened, and I'm sure the story is familiar to many of you.

We'd like to remind ourselves how Esther then, first of all, came into this royal position. Well, we see remarkably in the book of Esther, various different people are used by God to bring Esther where she was.

And he used various different people at different times in the life of Esther. And I'd like just to go through some of these people as we meet them and encounter them from the beginning of Esther chapter 1.

[1 : 32] Just to go back to see how, and to recall how Esther then came into this royal position for such a time as this. As I said, various different people then were used by God to do this.

Various individuals, both men and women. The first one we meet in Esther, as you know, is the king himself. He's known by two different names, Erksus and then Ahussarus.

He's the king at this time. Now, as you know, the book of Esther's place just after Ezra and Nehemiah. So it's positioned there to remind us that these events are happening.

The Jews had returned. The decree had gone out. Cyrus had issued the decree that God's people were allowed to return home. But for some reason, some of the Jews were quite happy, as it were, where they were.

They had made their homes and they didn't, as it were, immediately leave Persia. And they stayed there. And this is the situation we find here.

[2 : 46] Some of the Jews, who perhaps should have gone back when Cyrus had issued his decree and allowed the people to go back, had remained.

And we meet this king, Erksus, who reigned from his royal throne, Ahussarus. And we see from chapter 1 how powerful a king he was.

If you glance down some of the verses, you see the extent of the territory that this king governed over. You'll see the figure 127 popping out of the page.

127 provinces. This king, Erksus, is governing all this vast area, it says. And it disguised it from India right through to Ethiopia.

A vast area. This one man was the whole king of that area of Persia. And something else that points towards his power, as well as the extent of his kingdom, the number of areas included in that, there was something else that he liked to demonstrate his power and influence, was by having these feasts.

- [4 : 00] And these feasts, he wanted to draw attention, as it were, to his power. And the lavishness of his feasts, of his hospitality.
- He was trying to proclaim to these people how important he was, how supreme he was, and how authoritative he was. And so these things demonstrate to us, first of all, he was a very powerful king.
- As I say, governing such a wide area, and showing off, as it were, his power to these people. And that leads us to the next thing about this king, Erksus. As well as a powerful king, it leads us on to that he was a proud king.
- As I've just said, he had these feasts to demonstrate his power. And he did it in a very proud way. As you see there, another number that jumps out to you is 180 days.
- He did it for a long period. To allow such a vast empire, that for different people to come, it would take quite a while.
- [5 : 08] Therefore, it was expended for such a long time, so that no one would have an excuse not to come to visit him. And this was an extent of his pride, his boastfulness.
- The feasts were long, as I say. And we note one of the Psalms, Psalm 49 says, Man, despite his riches, does not endure.
- But this king doesn't seem to take that on board. He liked his feasts and his power. And he lived, as it were, for today. And he had no thought, perhaps, of the future.
- But we're warned in that Psalm 49, Man, despite his riches, does not endure. So this proud king had forgotten that he was going to be accountable to the king.
- And he had become very proud of his achievements, of his riches, of his feasts. And they had to be bigger and better than anyone else's feasts. And finally, at the end of this demonstration of his power and his pride, seven specific days were set aside for feasting, just to demonstrate again his pride, that he was able to feast these people for seven whole days.
- [6 : 24] As well as a powerful king, this man, and certainly a proud king, he was a very poor king. Because as I hinted at already in the introduction, after these things, I said to you that he took rather too much to drink, perhaps.
- And he became very happy, if not drunk, and difficult to tell from the text. But certainly he had a wee bit too much to drink.
- After all, he'd been eating and drinking for seven days. And I'll add on to that, the six months of inviting people in. So you can imagine by now, he was a bit merry, as we would say.
- And so he was a poor king. He let himself get into this condition of, as it were, almost drunkenness.
- And then his advisors came in and started to influence him at that point. And he's so easily angered, you see, throughout the various chapters.
- [7 : 29] He's a very angry king. And he liked people to flatter him. But that's why he did these feasts and things. He wanted to draw attention to himself.
- As I said earlier, the passage that comes to mind in the New Testament is that of the rich fool. Remember I said to you, the psalm says, Psalm 49, verse 12, man, despite his riches, does not endure.
- And Jesus, in the New Testament, illustrated this by telling a story about a rich, young fool. You know the story well in Luke chapter 12.
- And he said, let's take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. And that's exactly, I think, what this king was doing, like that rich, young fool.

But remember the words in Luke that came. It says, this very night, your life will be demanded from you. So despite being such a powerful king, he certainly was a proud king.

[8 : 30] And in fact, he was a very poor king. But yet, this king was used by God. God used him because he was there at that time.

And he was attracted towards Esther. There's a proverb, it's Proverbs chapter 21, verse 1. It says, The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

He directs it like a water course, wherever he pleases. So, we're reminded, the first person that God uses was this powerful yet proud but poor king.

Yet God used him because Proverbs, as I say, Proverbs 21 says to us, The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. He directs it like a water course wherever he pleases.

So, see how God is using various people just to bring about his will and purpose so that the stair could be brought into this royal position. He uses this king.

[9 : 29] His heart was in his hand. But I think the proverb obviously takes it further, doesn't it? We can take that further and say, each one of our lives is indeed in the hand of the Lord.

And he can direct our lives. If he can direct the life of a king, he can direct each of our lives. So, that's the first thing I would want to draw your attention to.

The first person that God used was this king, this powerful king, but yet proud and poor king. As we think about this king, this King Ericsson, can I just spend a wee bit of time comparing him where it started our service singing, was it in Psalm number 93 about the king?

And it reminds us that in comparison we have such a powerful king, haven't we? Ruling with such great authority and who is controlling all these events.

And he's in charge of all these events, all the delays. He has his purposes. Remember, the life of Joseph is similar.

[10 : 40] Joseph in the right place at the right time. That was his purpose. And Joseph eventually saw that. His delays are also sometimes in his providence.

Remember, when he found out that Lazarus was ill, he delayed, was it two more days? A total of four days he delayed.

And so we learn throughout Scripture that God's delays and his actions are all within God's providence and for his sovereignty governing different events.

He is in absolute control and he has dominion. And he watches over the interests of each of his children. Nothing escapes his notice or happens without his permission.

that's the kind of king that we have reigning over us this morning. As I say in Psalm number 93, we started singing about that king. And it's that king, I pray, that is governing over your personal life.

[11 : 44] So it's taking control of you and letting, as it were, why don't you give your hands into such a powerful king, the one who can control your movements and his providence guide you to where you will be.

And so you can also say I am in this position for such a time as this because you know that God in his power and his providence and his ruling has directed all these things.

That's one thing I take comfort of even today that even being here today I can say left myself I probably would be very shy and a bit embarrassed perhaps which I tend to be but knowing that if we believe that God is directing us and putting us in positions there's a reason behind it he's put you in this position for such a time as this and it's a great encouragement to me this morning to take these words on the heart from my own life and to realise that we can speak with more assurance because God has a purpose behind it and that's an encouraging thing if we believe in a powerful king we believe that what we are doing is in his service and we can grasp that and take confidence in him not in ourselves but confidence in the king of a sovereign purpose for our life and what we are doing and where we are for the benefit of others so take encouragement at this thought we are in a position where we are what we are going through

God using perhaps different people and it's all for such a time as this it was a long chain of events wasn't there between what's happening here and what happened throughout Esther and sometimes we are in a position like this and it's only at the very start that yet we don't see as it were all the steps unfolding quickly but we can take confidence can't you this morning to grasp hold of that idea that you are in this powerful hands of this powerful king and he is wanting to direct you and use you as well as this king remember we talked about the feasts that this king was inviting his people to and welcoming his people to well we have a king that encourages and welcomes us to his feast and this we find especially you know the song of songs he brought me to his banqueting house and his banner over me was love and reminded that if we think of this feast here we are reminded of the song of songs that God as it were wants to invite you to his feast he wants you to come in other words to participate shall we say in the Lord's

Supper for example it's a time of coming under God's banner of love where we are feasting with him in love and we are encouraged to come you know when Ertzis issued his decree for these different people to come as I said it was a wide area many difficulties of transport and excuses could have been brought by people how they couldn't come they didn't bring excuses they had a six month period to come and therefore they had no excuse to come and the king would be very offended if they hadn't come and we would have dealt with that situation but when our king invites us to come who are we not to take up that invitation or command to come to his banqueting house so that his banner over us is love he wants you to welcome you to his kingdom and to feast with him we haven't read but you can read of the glory of the king of the garden in chapter 1 verse 6 a beautiful picture of the garden and the palace you can read it there yourself the beauty of this building and the surroundings of it but you know the beauty of our lord and the surroundings that surround him are even more beautiful and when

[16:06] Isaiah in chapter 6 saw these things the lord high lifted up and his throne train filled his temple then he his response to that was holy holy holy so the king was the first person that god used despite his pride in being such a poor king god still used him and we're reminded in comparison what a great and powerful king we have and he is the one this morning inviting you to come to his as at their banqueting table and to come into his presence to come under his banner his banner over me was love so I encourage you to think about that invitation of our king this morning the second person that god used as I mentioned as well in the introduction is this queen bashti some of you know this story quite well and as the king is feasting with his pals as it were she was as we would say not like a hen knight but she was having her time with her woman so she had her own party with her woman and just at that time the king asked bashti as you know to come into his presence so that all these visitors could see how beautiful she was and as you might know she refused to come she didn't obey her husband and there's lots of interesting commentaries about that but I don't want to go into too much detail but just the fact how god used bashti

I think taking it all into account she made the right decision not to subject herself to go into this feast to be looked at by all these men in their drunken state she stood her ground but as a result she was discharged never allowed to go into the king's presence again and the result of that was that a decree was made that would make all women give honour to their husbands and so that every man should be ruler of his own household the interesting thing was how Vashti was used by God in her position of queen here was something she wouldn't subject herself to she she acted out of honour

I think and yet because of this move it left the door open as you'll see to Esther coming into the picture so God used Vashti in this way due to her not submitting as it were to the king at that time he did quite wrongly I think ask her to do this we reminded in the New Testament just for a quick lesson about this just to qualify it a bit more we know that in Ephesians 5 for example there's a passage there that talks about relationships between women and men and yes women are called to submit to her husband a wife should submit to her husband it says but what the king the other side as we would say the other side of the coin to that the other side of scripture as you know is that husbands should love their wives and yes well the king wasn't acting as just love and therefore that's where the balance fell down in Vashti's circumstances that were reminded that practical lesson for ourselves as we think about Vashti so Vashti was used by God in her stance for correctness she was disciplined not allowed to go before the king again and this decree being issued and the search then issued to look for another queen so then the next people that God used to bring

Esther into such a royal position at a time like this was the king's advisors I've already mentioned them but this idea about Vashti they exaggerated it if you read through chapter one it's very exaggerated and as you think about it more and more to issue this decree and tell everybody about what had happened was actually worsening the state of things rather than dealing with it in a more loving way so the advisors that were advising the king were used by God and they were just wanting to please the king and God used these advisors in his overall purpose so that again Esther would be brought into the picture so that's another lot of people God uses here to bring Esther into the picture into the royal position for such a time as this and then there's this character which is called

Hegai we didn't have time to read chapter 2 but as you go back and there's more time in the afternoon read chapter 2 about this character Hegai and he too is used by God he was in charge of all the women that were the advisors went out to look for women and they were called to come in and Hegai was put in charge of these beautiful virgins and to give them 12 months of beauty treatment and it says that God disposed his heart towards Esther and she pleased Hegai and won his favour and so again you see how Hegai is used by God and God as it were drew attention amongst all the women his focus was on Esther and he gave Esther the right advice he gave her good advice and as a result of that as a result of Hegai's advice and as a result of

[22 : 52] Esther winning his favour Esther was finally brought into God so we see how these various people were being used by God Hegai was used by God the king's advisors were used by God and then we think of Esther herself as used by God her beauty was used by God and as you read through Esther you see quite often how she won the favour of the different people she won the favour of Hegai she won the favour of the king and obviously it reminds us of the story of Joseph doesn't it when Joseph won favour of Pharaoh God I'm sure was there acting so that Esther would win favour with these various people and we're encouraged then to think about Esther and how she was used by God her beauty was used by God and her demeanour was used by God so that the king's attention was focused upon her so you see how the events are all linking in together

I said she was brought into a royal position for such a time as this and how these various people God had put in these various circumstances were all used by God to bring Esther into the picture and the final character I wanted to draw attention to is Mordecai who was used by God he too gave Esther wise counsel he adopted Hadassah Esther Hadassah was the Hebrew name he adopted her she lost her parents when she was quite young and Mordecai her uncle brought her up acting like a father adopting her into the family and we are reminded that this is one of the reasons as Mordecai adopted Esther that that event led on to Esther being able to draw favour from all around her and I thought about this that God has adopted each one of us and he is able to grant us favour before others ensuring that we will be able to fulfil his purposes just as

Mordecai adopted Esther and she was granted favour before others ensuring that his purposes were fulfilled I'm saying that God has adopted us like that and I think he is able to grant us favour before other people in a similar fashion and why does he do that ensuring that his purposes will be fulfilled and so like Joseph and Esther we can because we have been adopted by God he can use us and he can grant you favour before others so that his purposes can be fulfilled remember the early church it says one of the signs of the early church was that they were praising God and enjoying favour of all and what was the result of that was that the result was that the Lord added to the number daily you see where that's leading if God uses us and adopts us like Mordecai adopted

Esther and she was able to gain favour for others and God through that was in control and brought her to be queen and eventually save her people then that was the sign of the early church they were praising God and enjoying favour of all God had adopted these people in Acts and that's how they were living and it says they were enjoying favour of all and the result as I said was that the Lord added to the number daily and that was our prayer this morning we're not wanting favour from God to attract attention to ourselves but we like the early church want to be praising God and our desire to be adopted by God and we would enjoy favour of all others because of our demeanour because of our acceptance of God's will for us because of our knowledge of his kingship over us then as a result of that we'll see growth as a result of

God working through us showing favour because his presence is with us because he has brought us into his family then the result of that is that people will notice just like Hegai noticed Esther just like the king noticed Esther God I think God adopts us into his family why can't we then be like the early church enjoying favour of all because of what God is doing in our lives because God has placed us where we are and the result of us acknowledging that fact is that we will see spiritual growth where we are and so these are the various people that God used to bring Esther into the royal position such as she was in God was working out his purposes and it's something to reflect on just for a moment that there was

[28 : 38] God working behind the scenes as you know in the book of Esther God's name isn't mentioned yet it's so evident especially in this verse for focusing on God has put you in a royal position for such he doesn't say God has put you in such a royal position he just says you have been put in a royal position for such a time as this but we see God's hand in it all God working out his purposes God working behind the scenes as I said earlier on this is where we can take encouragement of what we're doing if we grasp this truth that we are where we are because God has a purpose in it for such a time as this and we can take confidence in him knowing that he's in control knowing that he's able to use us and come under his reign so Esther had come into a royal position for such a time as this and we encouraged the king inviting these people to the feast they came and as I said earlier the king is inviting us to come under his rule now just briefly

I was thinking about how then this time came about just to do this very briefly we looked at how Esther came into the royal position that she came into we noticed how God used various people and he used men and women to bring Esther to where she was at this time now how did this time what was it referring to when Haman was offended because Mordecai didn't bow his knee to him that's how the time for such as this arose we read it in chapter 4 chapter 3 and chapter 4 rather chapter 3 it was where Haman became so proud of his promotion in fact if you read Esther chapter 2 and you read about Mordecai being used by

God to find these two people after the life of the king it's quite a surprise because the first thing you read in chapter 3 is Haman was honoured it's quite ironic that just after reading about Mordecai suddenly you come across this verse Haman you expect to see there Mordecai was honoured but no Haman was honoured and as a result of that Haman became a very proud man and this is how this time came about because of Haman's pride and because he was promoted so quickly and as we read in chapter 3 we saw how Mordecai refused to bow his knee before Haman most commentators agree this goes back to ancient history I think one of the verses we quickly read we did read about Haman being an enemy of the

Jews and if you go back the references are Exodus 17 if you want verse 16 and Deuteronomy 25 17 if you want the references but these references indicate that the Amalekites that Haman belonged to were enemies of the Jews and so many put the roots behind of what happened here to the old history God had ordered to blot out Amalekites memory and Haman was because of his linkage to his parents and all that belonged to the he was an agagite and so he was an enemy of the Jews and that's what led to these events happening for such a time as this it all started up due to the pride of Haman that's what it was all linked to because Haman was such a proud man and perhaps as we come to a conclusion this morning we have to take warning over this act of

Haman reminding us the evilness and danger of pride and I already said how we can be so confident in the Lord because he is the one that is in control but Haman was confident in himself he became very proud and as you know in Proverbs the famous verse it says pride goes before destruction a haughty spirit before a fall how true these words became in Haman's life as we'll see in the evening we're going to continue in Esther and look at how it develops and how true that was pride went before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall and so just a reminder how the time of such this came about basically due to Haman's pride and all I'm saying is the scriptures are warning each one of us not to be proud in in 1st

[34 : 05] Peter it says clothe yourself with humility towards one another God opposes the crowd but gives grace to the humble humble yourself therefore unto God's mighty hand that he may lift you up you see in conclusion we've no reason to be boastful have we because it's not by observing the law that we are accepted before God that we are justified by faith we're reminded aren't we by grace we are saved through faith this is not from our self it's the gift of God not by works so that none can boast so as we think about the pride of Haman let us remember that we've nothing to be proud of in ourselves because we've no reason this morning to be boastful at all because thank the Lord we have been justified by faith and it is by grace that we have been saved God has brought us to knowledge of himself because of his grace and we are humbled by the fact that God is our king and ruling over us and he wants us to be like the tax collector who falls before him and saying

Lord have mercy upon me so the time such as this arose basically because Haman was a proud man and I'm just saying as a reminder that we are thrown back upon God's grace this morning to realise that we are where we are we're in a position such as we are this morning due to his grace there's nothing to be proud of a lot to be thankful for because we have a king that has brought us into a position this morning isn't it wonderful that God has brought us into even to this church together to worship him where else would we might have been this morning and he's done this because his grace has brought us into this position of worshipping him and being with him this morning in this very place and the blessings that brings to us so you remember perhaps this verse God has brought

Esther into this royal position for a time such as this that I believe that God is working in each one of our lives bringing us into the position that we are in of other Modest noodles couple shall love them probably to will they not hold that