

Plan and Purpose

Esther 4:14

Introduction

I want to share with you a story today of what the sovereign hand of God can do even in the midst of trial, tragedy, bad decisions...brokenness.

- o That's a Christianese type word...brokenness is anything that makes your heart sad.
- o It may be a set of circumstances someone is born into — broken home, addicted parents, brothels around the world. — or it may be bad decisions, sin, crazy circumstances in this life.
- And what I want you to see today is there is nothing too broken, messy, or tragic that is beyond God's reach. Isaiah 59:1: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear."
 - o Not only to save, and redeem, but you use that story...God works to bring redemption from brokenness

Scripture

- I want to spend some time telling you this story today. It's a wonderful story...filled with excitement and irony, intrigue, tragedy and triumph, there is violence and mercy...
- So open with me to the book of Esther and let me just begin to tell the tale...King Ahasuerus, mid 400s, throws a party in order to show off his wealth and splendor.
 - o **Illustration:** How long would it take you to show someone your possessions and power...bank account, here is my car, here is our house...maybe a few possessions that are of note, a guitar, a boat...whatever.
 - o It would take like an hour, it takes king Ahasuerus 180 days of feasting and parading to show off his possessions.
 - At that end of that time he ends up getting drunk and making a bad decision, I bet he did! A six-month party will probably get you pretty drunk!
- Him and his buddies drink for seven days, totally drunk...and it's time to show off his greatest "possession", and I put that in quotes...

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. ¹²But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

- And he calls Vashti to come out wearing her crown. What is he doing? He wants her to parade her beauty. He wants her to show off. Some commentators think wearing your crown means only wearing your crown, so everyone can see that you are beautiful and you are mine.
- Now, in the ancient world, king of the most powerful nation on the planet, shame and honor culture, hierarchical culture...what he says happens, what he wants he gets, but Vashti says no...
 - o She refuses...I want you to imagine the courage, dignity, and integrity that this takes...she should be praised for this...
 - o We live in a similar culture, it's not that uncommon for a man to push a woman to wear this or that to show off.
 - o Now, in terms of the story you gotta remember that the story starts with a pagan queen refusing the king.
- So Ahasuerus wants a new queen, and that's how he meets Esther...Officials go looking for the most beautiful women in the kingdom, maybe even like 1,000 women¹...and Esther is one of them that is chosen and taken into the harem.
 - o Who is Esther? Esther is the adopted daughter of her cousin Mordecai...
^{2:7}He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.
 - o Now this whole scene brings up an issue that we have to talk about that every Christian on earth deals with including you and me...and that is, how do you be a child of God in Persia?
- Now on the face of it, that may not seem apples to apples but you could say it like this, every believer faces pressure to assimilate to worldly culture...
 - o And that's here...Mordecai and Esther are exiles, Persia is not their home, the customs and religious practices of the people are not their customs and religious practices...
 - o They are aliens in a foreign culture, and yet they are called to live for God, a different kind of life in that culture...
- Every one of us have blindspots to ways that we assimilate in, where the pressure gets to us...Every believer has blindspots, ways that we are assimilating to a world that is not our home...
 - o Honesty with finances, what we think is OK to consume in entertainment, what we think about creation, things we laugh about...the world puts immense pressure on us.
 - o Illustration: The Mariana Trench of the coast of Japan and the Philippines is miles deep. Seven miles down the pressure is unbelievable. Up here the atmospheric pressure on us is 15 pounds per square inch, down there...it's 15,000 pounds per square inch

¹ Keller

- It's enough to crumple a car, much less a human. Without military grade enforcements to withstand the pressure we will explode down there, well implode!
 - The word of God and the community of the saints fortify us from the pressure of the world...Group is where we fortify against the pressure of the world...
- Well for Esther and Mordecai the pressure was getting to them, and you see that in a couple ways...her name change is one
 - o Hadassah means myrtle, it's probably associated with God's blessing, but changing the name to Esther which means star was a step in assimilation to the culture because the name is taken after the goddess Ishtar²
 - o And secondly there is no protest from Mordecai or Esther over being taken into the Harem
- Well Esther is taken to the Harem...and it's a contest really to see who the next queen will be
 - o The women are prepared for a year for their one night with the king...tough deal culturally obviously, but that's what it was...
 - o Esther is being prepared, Mordecai is checking on her day in and day out...and the time comes for her night with the king. ^{2:10}Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known...¹⁵When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her
 - The implication is, being a Jew will disqualify you so don't mention it, what? And if you want to win, do what Hegai tells you...and so she listens
- This is murky...Are there power dynamics? Yes. Is this complicated? Yes. Is this horrible morally what the women are being asked to do? Oh my, yes...Is it possible that Esther is in the game to win the game? I think so...
 - o There is no protest from this Jewish girl who isn't supposed to marry this guy...I mean Vashti said no, why doesn't she?
 - o I also as a father don't like the double standard, it's not helpful...we say to our boys, be a Daniel face the lions den, be a Joseph go to prison rather than be silent in the face of a power dynamic and sexual situation
 - But with Esther we say, well what could she do...
- Either way, I think in this story we are really seeing the brokenness now...orphan with no power, minority culture, she is put in a bad spot here but probably is

² TOTC, Baldwin

street smart enough to go along...and yet, God is still moving and can bring a miracle from this mess...

- Well what happens? ^{1:2}the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti
- Now, the plot thickens as we meet a man named Haman...to this day in the feast of Purim that celebrates this event in Jewish culture, March 10th this year...they hiss at his name
 - o Terrible character, he has such an insecurity and idolatry problem concerning identity that he ends up wanting to kill every Jew in the kingdom, because one Jew won't bow down and grovel to him...guess who? Mordecai...
 - o So Haman makes a plan with the king to sell all the Jews, have people rise up and kill them and take their wealth, in order to put a bunch of money in the king's treasury and the king says...no problem
 - Remember he doesn't know Esther is a Jew...
- But Haman hated Mordecai because he wouldn't bow to him, and therefore he hated all the Jews
 - o Now, no one knows the Esther is a Jew...so Haman makes up this plan that on a certain day all the Jews in the kingdom will be wiped out, and the king goes for it... ^{3:13}Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods
 - Just FYI, the 20th century wasn't the first time people have tried to wipe out the Jews...But as old time preacher J Vernon McGee said, "The Jew has attended the funeral of every ruler that has tried to exterminate him."
- Things are heating up now..Mordecai goes into mourning and Esther wants to know why...so he lets her in, they are going to kill all the Jews...
 - o But Esther's reaction is defensive...and this is interesting to me, she immediately feels like, I am supposed to do something, but the risk is too great... ^{4:11}"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."
 - She's like, oh no...I know where you're going with this. I am not going in there, you saw what happened to Vashti, it'll be worse with me!

- Mordecai responds by saying Esther, your life is already on the line...when the king makes a decree it's total, whether you are the queen or not
- And then comes the most iconic phrase in the entire book...I think one of the most iconic phrases in all of the OT... ^{4:14}For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
 - o And this is where Esther steps into her moment, this is why I don't love the poor baby version of the story of Esther...because she is strong, because she has been through some things in her life...
 - o Parents gone, taken by the king...and God uses those things to fashion in this woman a backbone of steel
 - She tells her cousin, you go pray...with everyone that you know, and I will do the same, and then I will act...and it is what it is, if I perish I perish
 - May we raise daughters like this...heart for the people, compassion and care, backbone of steel, leaders that God uses in big moments in world and church history...
 - There is a 7 to 1 ratio of single women over men on the mission field, that's always said as an indictment to men, can we celebrate it that God is raising up modern day Esthers to stand in the gap for the nations...
- She goes into the king, life on the line...and the king puts forth the scepter, it's like the thumbs up or down moment in gladiator...
 - o She gets the thumbs up and the king says what is your request, and she says I want you and haman to come to a feast and I will give you my request tomorrow
 - o Haman is overjoyed...all he wants its to get in good with the king, and now the queen is inviting him to a feast!... ^{5:11}And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. ¹²Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king-has to promote self, even the queen only invites me...how many of us right now live and die and what other people think about greatness?
- Haman's idolatry is the praise of people...You know really this book is set up to show us that the world has a beauty treatment for us all
 - o That our value is in what we have, the way others see us, what we look like...beauty, money, power, career...

- o But that pride and greed and idolatry is getting the best of Haman...he hates Mordecai, they said build huge gallows to pin him to...
 - The direct translation is tree, or wooden post...we think hanging, but it's probably pinning or even nailing to the gallows...
- There are some other things that happen, but let's get to the feast. Finally the king asks, what is your request and Esther says...
 - o My people have been sold, and if it was just slavery, I wouldn't do this...but we've been sold to death
 - The king is enraged, he says who has done this? ^{7:6}And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.
 - And as he is begging for his life from Esther, he falls on her on the couch right as the king walks in...I mean the coincidence in these stories, the mighty sovereign hand of God
 - And think, the king says you would assault the queen, right here in my house...

7:8 As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. ⁹Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

- Unbelievable...Mordechai becomes the new Haman, a new decree goes forth that that Jews can organize and defend themselves...they have the king's blessing, on the day of their execution they rallied and overcame their enemies...the sons of Haman were killed, the days were held from then on for a feast and to remember the goodness of God, and Mordecai became the second in command of all the kingdom...
 - o What a story...Jewish girl persuades pagan king³ who saves the people of God who one day produce the King of kings
 - Three things that you can't miss

1. God works even when we can't see it

- Did anyone notice that in all of the verses I read, one glaring name was left out? God...
 - o In fact, if you go home and read the entire book and catch all the stuff I couldn't hit, you will realize that one name is absent...God
 - o And it's not like someone wrote a book of the Bible and then said, I forgot God? This is intentional
- And the idea is, that even when we don't see it, God is moving

³ Dates

- o Think about the song we sang, “Waymaker” — even when I don’t see it, or feel it, you are the way maker...God you are moving
- We are conditioned only to see God move in the big miraculous breakthroughs in our lives...
 - o The ark, the Red Sea, the sun standing still...but somehow we miss that even in a drunken king deposing his wife, God can use and move through it all...
 - God was at work. We are conditioned to see the Red Sea and think God⁴...but God is here. He works in ordinary ways.
 - God moves in the extraordinary and the ordinary, God moves in the miraculous and the mundane
 - In the moment, we don’t see it...when he works in ordinary ways we don’t see it. His silence isn’t absence
- Everyday 1,000 things line up for God to take us where we are going...Illustration: yea take them to Disney, but parents aren’t you ding dozens of things for them...filling out papers for school, packing a lunch, washing their clothes for a game, and on and on
 - o He is always moving he is always working...Call to the broken hearted today
 - o Maybe there is a wayward child, or an adoption that is taking forever, maybe a marriage that is hanging on by a thread...the biggest lesson from this story is that God is moving even if we don’t see it

2. God works through the brokenness

- Esther’s story is busted up and broken...starts in tragedy when we find out that she is an orphan. She is being assimilated to a godless culture...taking to the Harem, marries a godless man, this story is filled with sorrow and tragedy...
 - o And yet, God uses those things to bring about redemption...
- Gospel: Esther’s story is all of our stories...In sin, we lost our family, we wonder in assimilation to worldly power, and spend much of our life in a beautification process to be accepted and worthwhile...
 - o But Jesus Christ came to put an end to that destructive loop...what does Jesus do? Ephesians 5 calls him our true husband, he loves the church, we are the bride...
 - I know that’s weird if you are a dude, but it is an analogy. The Bible begins with a wedding and ends with a wedding...we are called to be the bride
- But this bride, you and I don't have to overcome our broken past, and messy lives to be accepted by the king, God almighty has eyes for us anyway...
 - o Jesus overcomes for us...

⁴ Keller

- o That's what the cross is, the husband giving himself over, accepting the bride and making her sinless and beautiful. The blood of Jesus washes us clean. He doesn't demand beauty, he creates it...
- Church, what you need to hear is this, if God can work in Esther's life to bring about His plans He can use any of us...there is no situation that is too far gone, because you aren't the one who has to tidy yourself up!
 - o Jesus gave his life to make the bride beautiful, and we are...sinless in fact before Him...
- Let's apply this personally, and then to adoption and foster care...personally, there is no situation too broken to be used of God
 - o If we will repent of our sin, confess our sin, cry to Jesus as our Savior...there is no situation that is too far gone...
 - God brings miracles from the mess, testimonies from the tragedy, and beauty from the brokenness...
- This is the God we serve. I am not saying every story turns out that way, but so many do when people hand over the keys to a God who works to bring redemption from brokenness...

Invitation:

- Hey for some of you right now it's time to confess sin, repent of sin, declare that Jesus is Lord...and see what he does with your life...
 - o Give your life to Christ, then come forward and let us know through baptism...pray I confess my sin and trust you as the savior...
 - o See what God does...Illustration: Flu, coronavirus, anna makes me open the windows...you don't know how bad you felt until you feel better

3. God works through us as we support adoption and foster care ministry

- Your situation isn't beyond hope, and neither is theirs...if God can work through this adopted child, He can work through any adopted child
 - o Does every story turn out like this? Sadly...no. While the outcome is in God's hands, faithfulness is in ours
 - o God has a plan for every child. A plan, a purpose, a calling, and a destiny...and we affirm that in the way we support adoption and foster care
 - o How are you thinking about being a part of what God is doing...
- Will you hold the rope, there is no pressure, but this is a calling to adopt or foster
 - o But will you hold the rope for those who are by giving
- Is God working on you and your family, to be the ones who don't just hold the rope, but build your family through adoption, or reunify a family through foster care?

Conclusion

- Big doors swing on little hinges⁵
- "By the time of Xerxes, Persia dominated the entire Middle Eastern world. The Jews who did not return [to Israel] under Cyrus (538 BC and later) and other Persian rulers thus became Persian subjects instead of Babylonian" (Merrill TWATW). Mordecai and Esther lived around Susa, the Persian capital.
- Gospel: Didn't God see more in us than met the eye?
 - o Illustration: Ex 2:10...Plucked from the water for greatness
 - o God isn't even mentioned in Esther. The only place he seems more absent is on the cross⁶
 - o Will you see God working out salvation for us tonight? Will you humble yourself? Will you see that God sent another...not unlike Mordecai
 - o He too was a savior for his people...but he didn't ride on a magnificent horse, he rode on a donkey...
 - o He too wore a crown...of thorns
 - o He too had a robe...of mockery...
 - o He too was paraded before men...but it wasn't in honor, but the dishonor and shame of the cross...
 - o Don't you see? All of God's providence in our lives hinges on what we do with His Son...
 - o Jesus became judgment of Haman, so we could be blessed like Mordecai
 - o The true Esther, the true Mordecai, the one in whom the king should delight...but rejected that you might be His delight
 - o "Gallows" in Hebrew is literally "tree." According to Baldwin (TOTC),

Sermon by Andrew Hopper, lead pastor of Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, N.C. Permission has been granted for you to use these teaching materials for sermon preparation, small group Bible studies, personal study, etc.

⁵ York

⁶ York