



ESTHER

Flawed People Listening to God

The Gospel Story of Esther

Moments of Clarity

Our Learned Responses

We are going to spend some time trying to understand Esther, and her clarity story, so that we can understand ourselves and how this passage speaks to us.

Most people would see Esther's impact as heroic, largely due to the scope of the danger and the resulting rescue of many people, but, like all of us, she was a very complicated person, with both good and bad in a checkered past.

Think about Esther's life. What was it like for her? What was her driving motivation?

Esther's Life Circumstances

Mordecai's Example.

Why didn't Mordecai go with the other Jews who went back to rebuild the temple?

Esther & Ruth, Duguid, **In 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews to return home. Some went back with Zerubabel at that time (Ezra 1-2), but many stayed, comfortably settled where they were, outside the land of promise. Compared to a backwater like Jerusalem, Susa seemed a much better place to make progress in advance in the service of the empire, as Mordecai discovered.**

Exile in a foreign world.

Orphan.

Single woman.

Young girl.

Beautiful. Objectified?

Anti-Semitism.

Isolated

.... as a result, Esther ended up married to an uncircumcised pagan and virtually cut off from the community of faith, successfully pretending not to be a child of the true and living God. Was it possible completely to privatize one's faith as an exile, to be a faithful believer in private but never let it show in any outward way during five years of life in the Kings harem? Surely not. Her enviable progress in one world, the world of the empire of Ahasuerus came at the cost of completely suppressing her identity as a citizen of the kingdom of God. (ibid)

Sex trafficked.

Jews for Jesus website: (Esther 2:8) Esther didn't have much say in the matters that unfolded. She most likely didn't submit a résumé or raise her hand excitedly to volunteer for the harem. She was young, she was pretty, and she was taken.

Esther 2:12-14 – How willing was she?

From Jews for Jesus:

The virgins, who were all quite young, were escorted to the king, who is said to have been approximately 40 years of age at the time. They were taken one by one, for him to sleep with. They didn't return to the other virgins, but instead were added to the number of the king's other concubines (a.k.a. sex slaves without wife status). No other man could ever be their husband, and they never saw the king again unless he was "pleased with them." In short, the king test-drove all the models before making his purchase, and he "purchased" Esther to replace his former queen.

Forced into a Bad Marriage

Forced into A Bad Marriage with A psychopath

Forced to be Queen in a Pagan Land

Esther & Ruth, Duguid

Esther quickly learned not simply how to survive but how to thrive in her new situation.... Thus Esther learned to be a pleaser, first of all charming the Chief Eunuch in charge. ... The writer uses an unusual idiom to tell us that Esther "won favor" in the chief Eunuch's sight: she worked for her promotion in the house of women, by fitting into the agenda that the empire set for her. She was willing to let the empire define her reality. Resistance was not high on her program at this point; on the contrary, she seemed content, even eager, to be assimilated.

Mordecai filling her in.

It is to this Esther that Mordecai makes his appeal. Esther 4: **6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.**⁷ **Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.**⁸ **He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.**

So, Mordecai instructs Esther that she must do something, but she doesn't respond heroically at first. She responds as a person who has learned to navigate her world in order to keep herself safe.

Esther 4:9-11 - She sends back this message: Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

You will have to excuse her for doing what any of us would do in that situation: thinking only of herself. You have to Excuse her if she learned coping mechanisms to get through life unscathed.

A survivor of sexual trauma posted this online: "**Forgive yourself for not knowing better at the time. Forgive yourself for giving away your power. Forgive yourself for past behaviors. Forgive yourself for the survival patterns and traits you picked up while enduring trauma. Forgive yourself for being who you needed to be.**"

Reflexive, Not Reflective

Mordecai's Words

Mordecai directs Esther to some very important, underlying questions.

- Who are you?
- Who is God?
- Why are you here?
- What has God set before you?

Mordecai's response is very important. It is perhaps the key message of the book.

Mordecai sent these words back to Esther: ¹³ **Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 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?"**

Mordecai is trying to tap back into Esther's deepest longings, what she wants out of life, and who she thinks God is and what he wants for his people, that takes into account her history, her story, her humanity. He is not tapping into fear but a deeper story of life that she has forgotten.

1. **"Do not think to yourself that in the Kings Palace you will escape."**

2. **"Any more than all of the other Jews."**

3. **"Relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place."**

- Exodus 6:6 - Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.
- Psalm 18:2-3 - The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. ³I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.
- Psalm 34:17 - When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

4. **“for if you keep silent at this time you and your father’s house will perish”**

- Matthew 6:19-21 - Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- Joshua 24:14 - ¹⁴“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”
- Matthew 7:13-14 - “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

5. **“and who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”**

Esther’s response

Esther sends her reply (4:15-16): **Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶“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 attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”**

Esther had her moment of clarity. She knew what she was called to do and why. The latent faith, the reality of her God and her connection to his people, the conviction of who she was and what she must do, became clear to her. Her identity and loyalties became clear. I know who I am: I am not Esther the Queen. I am Esther the Jew, Esther of the people of God. He is my God.

We see it in her closing words: **“If I perish, I perish.”**

• **Job 13:15 - Though He slay me, I will trust in him**

• **Here is my heart; I offer it promptly and sincerely.** Jonathan Edwards

4:15 - She fasts. She prays, she can’t manage this. She can’t navigate this. She can’t do this on her own. God has to do this.

When the Gospel Story Becomes Our Story

The Broken People God Uses

The people God uses are all Broken. Frail. Flawed. Freed. Redeemed.

- Paul
- Peter
- David
- Noah
- Samson

Esther was a real person. She is not an idealized person. She had flaws. She had weakness. Just like all of us. But God used her. He drew her into his mission.

God uses even questionable people, who have made mistakes, who have compromised.

“I have been all things unholy; if God can work through me, He can work through anyone.”

Francis of Assisi

Iain Duguid puts into perspective the redemptive grace of God for us in this moment in Esther’s life: **“Because we are familiar with the end of the story, we are apt to see the answer to this question as obvious. Would Esther be in such a position of royalty if God had not raised her up? But given the nature of Esther's rise to prominence through an ethically doubtful marriage to a pagan and the concealing of everything distinctly Jewish about her lifestyle for the past five or six years, the question is real. It is as if someone who has risen up the corporate ladder by shady manipulation of the books, along with neglecting his family and any connection with the church, were to be asked to stand up at a board meeting for his faith over a crucial issue. His response might well be, "Could God really use someone like me after everything I've done—or failed to do?" The surprising answer in Esther's case is yes! God's providence works through all kinds of sinners (which, after all, is the only material he has available).”**

Second Act Christian

Jews for Jesus website:

He chose a woman who had everything taken from her – her parents, her freedom, her virginity – and He gave her everything. He used someone who, due to gender, culture, and circumstance, was powerless and invisible and made her the pivotal, formidable heroine.

Esther’s story is a powerful reminder that God can bring about new life, redemption, and freedom, even when it seems an impossible feat.

“Behold, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19)