

Esther 4:12-17 'Reluctant Servants; and Who Knows?'

Last time in Esther we looked at ch 4:1-11, 'Out In The Open For Christ', I called it, as we saw the results of Mordecai's conflict with Xerxes' right hand man, Haman. His declaration as to who he was, a Jew, had led to Haman's evil decree of the annihilation of the entire Jewish race! V1 Mordecai's public declaration of repentance and grief, crying out at the "king's gate" in the public square to God, though God's name is not mentioned. Yes "sackcloth, fasting and wailing" to get the attention of all, and yet particularly so of his adopted daughter the queen! And I said that I believe he had committed their plight to God, but he also had a plan: to get the Queen's attention and to call on her to come out of the shadows and step up to the plate for her people!

And I made the point that God had not only orchestrated all of these things, but they also took place only at His permission. We touched briefly upon Job chapters 1-2, that though sickness, difficulty and trial were indeed in Satan's hand, he could only act at God's permission. And though he acts for evil, God has predetermined all things for the good of His people!

In v4 Esther first tries to cover up the situation with clothes, as we do with our sin. Because her association to Mordecai would be revealed. And only after he refuses does she seek to find out why he was doing this. Then in v6-9, he lays the problem down at Esther's feet! *Yes now is the time my daughter for you to come out of the shadows of your ivory tower and into the open. You can no longer be a secret Jew in name only. You are the people's, (Gods people's Queen and hope, and it's time for you to act! And it is as if Esther is declaring, Father, are you really asking me to put my life on the line? This may well be certain death for me, unless the king points the golden sceptre at me. But there's a problem. "It's been 30 days since the king called for me) I may well be out of favour!*

And that's where we pick up the narrative this morning. Esther 4:12-17 'Reluctant Servants. And Who knows?' In v12-13a when Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back his answer.

Brothers and sisters, as I mentioned last time all of us are on occasions reluctant servants. Yes, each of us has things that we find difficult to do. Some are happy working behind the scenes for the Lord, and others out front. We each have different gifts and different personalities and God uses all of those things for His glory.

Well clearly, the reluctant servant is who Esther was at that time. She was reluctant to get involved and with good reason, she would literally be placing her life on the line! So the events are as follows: The decree is issued, Mordecai responds with "sackcloth, fasting and wailing." The Queen is then informed, she tries to cover up the problem, but Mordecai refuses because he doesn't need any clothes - that's not the issue. She finds out what the problem is, and how it's going to impact her, even perhaps counting the cost I guess, sending the information to him.

And now he responds to the words of his adopted daughter the Queen, the reluctant servant of God! V13b And they are confronting and challenging words to her, notice them. "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape!" *Esther my dear daughter this thing will find you out. This evil Haman will leave no stone unturned in his hunt for blood. Did you not read the King's decree? "Young and old, women and little children, destroy, kill, annihilate all the Jews." They know that you are from my household and if they don't already they will soon. They know who I am, you have no place to hide, soon they will eventually be coming for you!*

These verses reminded me of the first time that I ever went to church. I went at night of course so that no one would see me. Parked my car down the road, and as I came to the door of the Milton

Anglican church, I looked up the stairs and I saw one of the biggest men I had ever seen. In old Aussie lingo he was two pick handles across the shoulders with a big beard and wearing a black leather jacket. And I thought to myself, this Christianity must be serious stuff because they've got the bouncer on the door. But then a big smile beamed across the man's face and he said to me in a loud voice, "Come on in brother". And that was the beginning of a 38 year long journey between myself and Gary, and by God's grace it continues today! But yeah those first steps out in the open for Jesus were scary, and I took them reluctantly. But God is patient and merciful. "Slow to anger and abounding steadfast in love" the scripture says.

But friends the genuine believer though yes at times is a reluctant servant, has no place to hide and actually wants no place to hide. Because we have what the world needs: The message that our King has done what Mordecai is calling on his Queen to do. Come out into the open and stand between destruction and us and plead, yes intercede on our behalf! Job 16:12-21 "All was well with me, but he shattered me, he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He made me his target; his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gaul on the ground. Again and again he bursts upon me, he rushes at me like a warrior. I have sewed sackcloth over my skin and buried my brow in the dust. My face is red with weeping, deep shadows ring my eyes, yet my hands have been free of violence and my prayer is pure. O earth, do not cover my blood, may my cry never be laid to rest. Even now my witness is in heaven, my Advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God, on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend."

Hebrews 7:25 "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Yes, our King Jesus, intercedes that we might be delivered from death, even death eternal. Jesus is the King through whom we are reconciled to God so we have no place to hide and we want no place to hide, because we have the news that the whole world needs to hear; Jesus saves!

V14, friends notice Mordecai's words, because God is so clearly implied here. "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place." What is he saying? We are in God's hands. We are the people of the living God. We are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are the owners of the covenant promises of God. He has delivered us and sustained us for over 1500 years and though we have been faithless at times, God will never forsake his covenant promise which he has sworn by His Own self!

Les Stewart said to me many years ago, (after I was really disheartened by something when being a part of an outreach mission which they did, supposedly in the proclamation of the gospel) "Roy we can sit on our hands for the rest of our lives and God will still call His people. People being saved does not rely upon us, it relies upon God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. But we want to be the best instruments that we can be for Him because we want Him to use us for His glory. It is a blessing for us to serve Him, and it is a blessing for Him to use us! And as it is with our prayers, God can bring about His plans without them but He has chosen to bring about His plans through them. And yet need us, He does not. He chooses to use us and it is for our benefit and blessing!" Praise God! And basically that is what Mordecai is telling his daughter the Queen. For if you remain silent at this time, "relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place." *If you don't step forward and speak up at this time no matter, as He has done in the past God will still deliver His people. Because the promised Messiah must come. And yet if you don't, (having been placed by him in such a position of privilege as you have been at this time) there will be grievous consequences.* "You and your father's family will perish."

But since Esther was an orphan and had been adopted by Mordecai, I'm not really sure what is meant here. It may simply be that if she "perish" then so does her father's family line. It may be that as it is today, that all who reject God's call, refusing to come to him through His Son Jesus will face eternal consequences. Or it may even be him telling her that though God will still save His people, you and I and our family will be lost! And yet whatever it be the message is clear. That we can all be guilty of being God's reluctant servants at times! Do we hold out tongue when God's Name is blasphemed around us, because we are fearful and don't want to rock the boat? Are we ashamed to Own our Saviour because of the wickedness of the world in which we live? Again, (and I say this with all sensitivity) are we the secret Christian, because to own our Lord comes with the cost and stigma of the Cross?

Well of Esther's dilemma Jesus put it this way, as we have seen many times before: Matthew 16:24-27 "I tell you the truth, if anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for me will find it. For what would it profit a man were he to gain the whole world and yet forfeit his soul. And what can a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with the holy angels, and he will reward each person according to what he has done." Yes this was Esther's reality and it is yours and mine as well! And Beloved, as I said at the start of this series, the following words I believe in many ways are the crux of the whole book. V14b "And who knows, but that you have come into royal position for such a time as this." Brethren let's be clear, Mordecai didn't know. He was no doubt moved by God to do as he had and yet he had no prophecy. He'd seen no vision. He hadn't heard some voice out of the dark as many claim today. And there was no golden beam of light marking his way ahead. He was doing only as we are all simply called to do: Act by faith within God's Providence in which we find ourselves!

For Esther, all she had were her father's instructions. And yet if she failed to heed the call God's Plan would not be thwarted. He knows the end from the beginning. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we pray, and of this there is no question. His will, will be done! No God would not and could not fail! Yes, "And who knows, but that you have come into royal position for such a time as this?" He's saying, *Esther we don't know, but it may well be that God has put you in this place at this time for this very reason.* Friends I've mentioned it many times before, we don't know the impact that God will have upon someone else's life through our actions. That simple act of kindness. That unspoken testimony of a life lived for Jesus. Speaking a word of witness in season. The offerings that we bring each week, the giving of a Bible to someone or the decades of prayer for the soul of someone we love. No, Christianity is not a results based faith!

Beloved, we face those "who knows" moments each and every day of our lives. Maybe not with the implications that Esther is now confronted with and yet perhaps for individuals, those implications may well be eternal. No we don't know, and yet God does know!

Well there has been this amazing transformation, this amazing conviction within her heart and mine during this to-ing and fro-ing. The reality has been made very clear to her that basically the situation in which she finds herself, has given her no choice. So she is going to go! Matthew Henry puts it that she can stay where she is and wait to be dragged out by Haman's henchman, or she can approach the king, trust in God, and say within her heart, I have harkened unto thy calling my Lord. "Thy will be done!" Before Mordecai had a plan and now Esther has a plan. And yet ultimately they are both one and the same. God's plan!

V15-16 And this is the 6th message so to speak between the two, and it will be the last. "Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai. Go, gather together all the Jews that 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, when this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” We have a similar transformation by a man in Acts 9:10-14: “In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias”. “Yes, Lord”, he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the House of Judas on straight street and asked for a man from Tarsis named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight”. “Lord”, Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your Saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your Name.”

It really is quite humorous. You see Ananias is basically saying *Lord, perhaps you are not aware of what has been happening down here. This guy Saul is a really bad man. He has been wreaking havoc throughout the whole church in Jerusalem and now he has come here to do the same!* And now that he has clued God in, Ananias believes the situation will have changed. Perhaps he believes that he will be relieved of his duties. He can go back to what he was doing, and continue to hide, waiting upon the knock on the door to be dragged out by Saul’s henchman. But that is not God’s plan for him! V15-16, “But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go. This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” *This is what I want you to do Ananias. Trust in me and go!*

And friends I want you to notice the very next word because it reveals a transformed heart and mind. He goes from being a quivering lamb, to a roaring lion for Jesus. “Then.” No more discussion, nothing else needs to be said. This reluctant servant has been empowered by God! V17 “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Yes, “Brother Saul.” “Placing both his hands on him.” “Then Ananias went to the house and entered it.” Can you see? Saul is no longer the murderous enemy but his “Brother.” The “both hands” show us the close proximity of the men to each other. Ananias had entered Saul’s personal space. There was no longer fear in Ananias’ heart, he had only love for this man. Yes “Brother Saul.” Ananias comes to the door and throws it open. Sees Saul and goes straight to him. “Brother Saul.”

Beloved only Jesus can do that. Take our reluctance and transform us into his fearless warriors. Trusting wholeheartedly in Him, that come what may we can say with Paul, Philippians 1:21 “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Dear friends, to be confronted with our own mortality is a sobering thing as many of you know. To ask that question, *What is this life really all about?* Well Paul tells us that this life in its entirety and indeed brevity, is to be lived for Christ. And death holds not fear and uncertainty but the reality of eternal glory with the Father Son and Holy Spirit, and the whole company of heaven, Praise God!

Well this is the reality that Esther is now confronted with. “Who knows?” Says Mordecai. God knows! V16 “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. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” What astounding words they are from this now brave young woman. That same woman who like Ananias, earlier in the day had tried to remain hidden, keep her nationality secret and not want to get involved. Can you see, like all of us I guess at times, that though her faith lay dormant for a while, it was real! And we’ve all had our moments of weakness and we will continue to have them, but God is patient, kind and loving. Yes “abounding in steadfast love.” Though she has been the secret Jew for the past seven and a half years, God had not abandoned Esther. Indeed her weakness in the faith He will use for His glory. Yes

God gains glory for Himself when He works through our weaknesses! And I understand these words in verse 16, to mean let us all put everything aside, every Jew throughout Susa, put food and drink aside so that we might petition God while praying for me. "Who knows?" He may yet give us Providence that the king will look with favour upon my actions, though they "be against the law." But I cannot do this thing on my own. I will need the prayers and support of you all!

Beloved can you see what God can do in our lives? Esther is not merely the Queen in title now, she truly has now become The Queen of the Jews. She is ready to give her life for her people! As Jesus said, John 15:13 "For greater love hath no man than this: That he laid down his life for his friends." Yes she was ready to go. She had made up her mind, but they must all empty themselves of every foolish thing, even daily needs, and commit the way ahead to God!

It really is in a sense, her garden of Gethsemane moment. It is in effect "Father if it's possible take this cup from me. Yet not my will but thine be done." Yes "If I perish, I perish." And in the same way that Jesus asked Peter, James and John to "keep watch," to "keep watch" with prayer and support, because in His humanity He felt as though he couldn't do it alone, Esther says "Fast for me." "When this is done I will go to the king." "And if I perish, I perish." Yes "Thy will be done O Lord."

There are many parallels in these two incidents. And yet Esther's is the mere shadow of Jesus's the reality! v17. "So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions."

But how do we bring these things to a close this morning? Well quite simply really. Firstly, we will all at different times throughout our lives as Christians, be our Lord's reluctant servants. Second guessing ourselves, thinking that we should have said this and we should have done that. But as with Esther, God is patient and merciful to us. His loving kindness is greater than life the hymn says!

And secondly, we need to pray that in those "Who knows moments," whether they be in trial, sickness, ministry, testimony or doubt, that God would help us draw near to Him and give us courage! And in our hearts with Esther be able to pray in whatever the situation maybe, "And if I perish, I perish." Or in other words, "Thy will be done O Lord!

Let's pray!