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## ESTHER 4

Esther Series

Let's take a moment and come before the Lord.

[PRAYER] Father, we do want to contribute to your expanding kingdom around the world. We know that this is one opportunity that allows us to do that, to take shoe boxes and fill them up with things for kids, and we know that the Gospel presentation will be placed in there with those and kids will receive it all over the world in their own language. So, Lord, we ask that you would be blessed by what we do and that you'd bless us as we this week consider, as we go shopping, how we might bless others through this ministry. Lord, be honored in our lives. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

Turn with me to Esther 4. Last week we learned about the villain in the story in Esther 3. His name is Haman and he had a serious problem. I just want to remind you what the things are we can learn from his problem. He was a guy who started out being annoyed. His annoyance that he had was this other guy, Mordecai, wouldn't bow down to him. He was annoyed by that and then that turned into anger and then it turned into a bitterness inside of him and he ends up getting revenge. He not only wants to kill Mordecai, but he wants to kill all of the Jewish people. That's pretty significant.

I want to suggest that if we don't deal with the problems in our lives, the small annoyances can turn into major problems in our hearts. So if it's anger, if you don't get rid of that anger, it can accumulate, it can turn into something really bad. That's what happened in Haman's life. If you have a problem with integrity and it starts out with just a little bit of lying, it can turn into something terrible over time. If you have a problem with materialism and you start spending a little bit, it can turn into a real problem over time.

You want to be able to deal with those things. How do we deal with them? It's God's grace that we appropriate. It's God who changes us and we allow Him to do that deeper in work in our heart. That's Haman last week.

Let's see how the good guys respond. Esther 4:1: *When Mordecai learned of all that had been done...* What that's referring to is that the edict was sent out to the whole empire that went from India all the way to Europe and then it went all the way down to Africa. We've got a huge area and all of the edicts are going out by courier telling everybody that the Jews on the twelfth of this particular month would be killed and that anybody who killed them would get to keep all their stuff. That's the motivation. Go kill him. If he has a house, you get his house. If he has a car, you get his car. They didn't have cars back then, but you get the idea.

*So when Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly.*

Since we don't really do sackcloth and ashes much in our community and our culture, let me tell you a little bit more about what that was in the Old Testament times. It was a sign, an outward sign of something that was inside the heart. It was either, or both, of repentance or asking God for deliverance. That's what it was. Repentance or asking God for deliverance and many times both, because the Jews knew that something was wrong. When something bad happens then something is wrong, something's going on here. That God was doing something. Maybe some kind of judgment that the person had actually did. But they were very aware of God's power.

They were aware that God disciplines people, that God has requirements for His people. They were in a covenant relationship with Him, a very close relationship, and they knew that when something was going on, they better be very careful. They knew that sometimes suffering was a result of personal sin and sometimes the person wasn't even aware of it. Maybe they did something wrong and so they're coming before the Lord and saying, "God, what have we done? What's the problem here?" This close relationship that they had with God is just an amazing thing.

I think we can learn from this. Sometimes in our culture we have kind of a consumer mentality. We'll come to a church and if we like the things that are going on in the church then fine. If not, they do something we don't like, we go on to the next church. We have this kind of consumer mentality.

But in the Old Testament when it comes to their relationship with God it was very personal and real. They recognized that God was power. So if there was some judgment, if there was something wrong in their lives that was causing this problem that was occurring outside in their environment, then they wanted to get right with God. They wanted to be drawn close to God. If it wasn't caused by them personally, it wasn't personal sin then they were drawn to ask God for deliverance.

Either way, do you see that the problems were drawing them close to God? If problems are pushing you away from God then there's something wrong in your understanding of who God is. Because God is the God we can come to no matter what's going on. Even if it's our problem that's caused the issue or the judgment or something, we still come to God. That's what we do.

I really like this story in the Old Testament of Hezekiah. He's one of my favorite kings. There aren't too many good kings in the Old Testament, but Hezekiah was one of the good kings. In 2 Kings 19 the story is unfolding about how he, Hezekiah, is king in Jerusalem and Sennacherib's army is attacking Jerusalem. They've surrounded them and now Sennacherib's taunting him saying, "Oh you got gods. Sure! Well the gods of that city, they didn't help him. And the gods of that city, they didn't help them. Your gods aren't going to help you either!" And with Hezekiah, the Bible says, sackcloth and ashes came before the Lord. "God, we need your deliverance. Would you please help us?"

I just love his example here. There's something very humbling about that process, about coming to God and saying, "God, I need your help." There's a temptation, I think, in our lives many times that when something bad happens or even when we're corrected we try to blame it or rationalize it or defend ourselves or something. We push it away. "It couldn't be me! It couldn't be me!" I think one of the wisest things we can do is we can say, "Lord, is it me? Have I done something here that's drawing this problem out here? Is there something I could've done better in this situation? Lord, am I doing something that I'm not aware of that's a problem here?" I think those are really good questions to ask first. Not that it's always your fault that bad things are happening, but I think that's the first question we ask. I think it's really important.

I do that at Calvary Chapel. If someone's offended by me or someone decides to leave the church or whatever, the first question I ask is, "Is there something I could've done better? Is there something that I did wrong?" Because I think that's the fastest way we grow. It's when we learn from the mistakes in life. We want to ask those very important questions.

Now not all suffering is the result of personal sin. You've got to hear me say that. I don't want to imply that it is. We talk about in our Bible study that we did in the Discipleship group a while back, we did "Seven Reasons Why Christians Suffer." If you're interested in that study you can ask Sue at the information table. We'll get it to you. There are several reasons why Christians suffer. One of them is because of sin in our lives. So we always ask that question first. But then if God doesn't reveal something then we realize God must be doing something else here. God must be doing something and I want to respond to that in the right kind of way.

Mordecai is a godly man, he's a righteous man, and he's coming before God and saying, "God, deliver us." He knows where to go when a problem happens in his life.

It reminds me of Psalm 121, a psalm I memorized when I was a preschooler. It's eight verses long. I have to read it because I memorized it in the King James Version and now we have it in the New International Version.

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.*

We need help. God has answers. Where do we go for our answers? We go to the Lord. We need to be in the habit of coming to God. He's the one who helps us. Mordecai now is crying out to the Lord on the streets of the city of Susa wearing sackcloth and ashes. That's the story of what's happening here.

Verse 2 says in Esther 4, *But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

Verse 4: *When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. She did not know why he was upset. And she was upset because he was upset, but she didn't know why he was upset. She wants to cheer him up. So she sends him clothes to put on. "Hey, cheer up," she says.*

It reminds me of what we do sometimes. We see someone who's upset, we don't like them to be upset, so we just say, "Here, here. Let me fix your problem," instead of sometimes listening first, finding what the real problem is. Sometimes we as husbands are guilty of saying, "You got a problem here? Let me solve it for you," instead of doing the listening necessary and the caring necessary in order to support that person.

That's what's happening here. She's just coming and tries to fix the problem. "Here, cheer up. Let me give you some nice clothes." But she doesn't realize what's really going on inside.

Let's look and see and we'll find out more. Verse 5: *So Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. Because he wasn't accepting the gifts, he wasn't cheering up. There must be something going on. She wants to find out what it is.*

Verse 6: *So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 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. 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 notice what Mordecai does. He says, "Let's get the facts down first. I want you to see the exact amount of money that's going into the king's treasury to do this. I want you to see the exact wording of the edict. I want you to see the facts. Because once you see the facts then I'm going to give you some instruction about what I want you to do." So we get back to the facts here in order to move forward.

If you put yourself in Esther's position, she's the queen, but in those times the queen didn't live in the same place as the king. The queen was summoned when she was needed or wanted. In this case the queen hadn't been summoned for thirty days. So she was in the harem, she was with the concubines, or wherever she was, I don't know exactly where, but she hadn't been summoned for quite a while. The law didn't allow her to just go and be in the presence of the king; she had to have permission to get in there. If she just showed up, she could get killed, be executed. So she has a problem.

Mordecai's saying, "Go to the king and take a stand or go to the king and ask for grace on behalf of your people. Do this." Now she has a predicament. She's ambivalent about this and I can see why. I'd be ambivalent too. She's risking her very life if she were to go in there. These were rules that the king had established or the kingdom had.

If you remember in chapter 1, the former queen didn't obey the rules so she was out of there. So we know this king is really good on the rule part here. He's not very compassionate sometimes. We already have some history about this king and the last queen was removed from being the queen because she wouldn't come in and display her beauty in front of the drunken guys that wanted to look at her. She said no and so she was removed from queen. Now Esther's in a predicament and she's got to deal with that.

The king could make an exception. If she showed up he could hold out his scepter and if he did, that was a sign that he was welcoming her in. But if he didn't then they'd just kill her right there.

Let's go on. Verse 9: *Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai (you can hear the ambivalence in the words that she's saying 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."*

Esther's having some ambivalence here because her integrity's being challenged. What will she do? She has a position, a really nice position. She's the queen. She has the approval of a lot of people. She has success in some ways and now she's being called to account, to do something that might jeopardize that.

What is it that's calling her to account? It's not just Mordecai. What's calling her to account is the conviction that her people are going to be destroyed. There's a challenge in her heart that I think we experience in our lives, which is the challenge between conviction and desire. It happens inside the heart first. That's where the wrestling takes place inside of our hearts. Conviction and desire. Desire's what we want to do, what we wish could happen, what we'd like to have happen, the things that we want. Sometimes the things that we want are in conflict with our conviction and there's this challenge. Sometimes what happens is we try to massage the convictions so that we can still have our desires. There's a temptation for all of us to do that in our lives.

I think Esther's trying to figure this out. Is there any other way that I can do this without going before the king? Is there any way that I can solve this problem and really deal with this and still have what I want (that is, to be the queen or have this position or without jeopardizing my life)? Is there any other way I can do this? But she ends up saying no there isn't a way that I can do this.

But we're jumping a little bit ahead of the story because we have to hear Mordecai's response to her. She's saying, "Hey, don't you know that anybody who goes in is going to get killed? He didn't even ask me to come in and see him for thirty days. I don't even know if he still likes me!"

Verse 12: *When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer.*

There are three statements that are made here. I want to look at each statement that Mordecai makes and I want to try to apply them in our situation in our own personal lives.

*When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer:* Number one – "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape.

Statement number two – *For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish.* Statement number three – *And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

Let's read that first part, statement number one again. He says, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape." What he's saying is you can't hide. You can't pretend that this is going to go away. You are a Jew.

Anytime that we lie we're taking a shortcut. For some reason we don't want to go the long way. We don't want to tell the truth because we might get in trouble. Or if we tell the truth we won't get what we want. So a lie is always a shortcut. Lies have consequences that can end up being terrible things in our lives.

"You can't hide," he's saying. "There's no way you can do this. It's not going to work for you. You can try to hide, but there's no way. You are one of these people." That's the first statement that's made.

Let's look at the second statement. The second statement says, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish."

I really like that because what it's saying is God isn't dependent on you to get His work done. I really like that. Deliverance will come from another source. In other words, you have the privilege or not to be a part of God's deliverance plan. You choose or not choose.

That is so humbling I think for all of us because sometimes we think we're really important, that God needs us and if we don't do it something's going to happen.

My dad taught me something when he and I pastored together years ago. He said this: "When you start to think you're really important, stick your finger in a bowl of water and pull it out and look at the impression you have made." I think that's really valuable. It just reminds us how insignificant we really are unless we're working along with what God wants.



Here's the reality. God is doing a work at Calvary Chapel Living Hope. I have the privilege of being a part of that. But if I were removed, God's work would continue. It would go on. God would bring in someone else. What that reminds me is I have the privilege to be here pastoring.

If you're serving and doing different things around here, I am so grateful for the support and the encouragement and the people that work around here. But if any of us were to drop off, if you decide, "I'm not going to do that job," someone else will step in because God's plan will continue on. That is so valuable.

It's important to me because when we recruit people for various jobs – we have a need over here, we have a need over there – I wish it weren't like that. I wish we weren't just saying, "Hey, we have a need. Would someone fill it?" I wish we were doing more of saying something like, "We have an opportunity here for you to be part of God's work. Would you like to step in and help in the nursery? Would you like to help deliver or take down the signs out front? If you don't want to, someone else will because God's work is going to continue." I really like that.

It's important for me to realize that God's work is going to continue, but I have the privilege of praying. Yesterday I was praying for a few people at Calvary Chapel Living Hope that came to my mind. I was praying for them and I had the privilege of being a part of what God was doing. God is going to do it anyway, but when we pray we have the privilege of entering into that.

I really like these words that he's saying to Esther. He's saying, "Look, it's going to happen anyway. You're going to be dead if you don't do it, so you may as well be a part of what God is doing anyway. You have a choice." I think it's really valuable for us to apply that to our life.

Number three, the third statement: *"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

Verse 14 is the key verse of the whole book of Esther because it demonstrates the power of God of bringing this person who grew up in a home raised by her cousin Mordecai, parents had passed away, and God was doing something amazing in her life. The whole story is the story of God's providence in this girl's life, in the lives of the Jewish people and amazing things are happening through it. Wow. What a picture that we get to see for such a time as this.

I really like working with people. I like pastoring because I get to see God working in people's lives. I never know how long I'll be able to work with you, but as long as you'll allow me and God allows we'll work together and I get to see some of the neat things that are going on in people's lives. It's a lot of fun.

I just think of these three kids that James and Monica are raising (foster kids in their home) that come and worship with us on Sunday morning. God is doing something amazing. I think of Esther raised in an alternative home. Here are three kids being raised in an alternative home. I say God has something going on in their lives if He rescued them out of wherever (I have no idea what their background is). But God has His hand on them; I want to be a part of that. Who knows that God will raise one of those kids up to do something amazing and we'll be able to say, "We

knew those kids when they were worshiping at Calvary Chapel Living Hope.” That’s what God does.

It just makes us think of our own life. All the things that have happened to you up to now in your life, God is using all of those things so that now as you come to meet the next person all of that stuff that’s happened to you, you now have resources, you have tools where God has done some things in your life in the past. He’s worked in you, He’s worked through you. He’s answered your prayers. He’s taken you through difficult circumstances so now you come to someone and they tell you a story and you don’t say, “That’s nothing,” you say, “I understand. That is painful. I’ve been through that kind of an experience.” Or “I don’t know anything about that, but I do know the God who understands those things.” So who knows that you may have *come to your royal position for such a time as this*. I think what it does is this passage gets us thinking above our normal circumstances.

I’m working on this book now that has to be turned into the publisher soon. I’m doing edits on this book and it’s about helping children. It’s called *Motivate Your Child*. Joanne Miller and I are writing this book together. This book talks about Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 thinking. I think I shared this with you before. But this is really helpful for me to think about this and I am continually wanting Level 3 thinking in my life.

Level 1 thinking is just the stuff you’re doing. You’re eating your food, driving your car, playing on your video game, whatever you’re doing. For kids or parents or anybody, that’s Level 1 thinking.

Level 2 is responsibility thinking. What else should I be doing? What date is it today? What do other people think about what I’m doing? Level 2 is responsibility kinds of things.

But Level 3 is the highest form of thinking. What’s God doing in my life today? Level 3 thinking is where I’m trying to help parents with their child to get kids thinking, “What is God doing here?” But it’s something I need to be doing.

Level 3 thinking is important for me every day of my life. What’s God doing here? I get in a situation, I’m waiting. I’m waiting in a doctor’s office or I’m waiting for some appointment or something. I’m saying to myself, “God, I know you’re in control, but it seems like you’re wasting my time here. But Lord, this is really your time so is there something you want me to do during this time? Do you want me to pray? Do you want me to think? It’s your time. I’ll serve you if this is what you want me to do, but you know all those other things I have to do. It would sure be nice if you’d release me from this so that I can go and do what I need to do.”

What is God saying in the current moment? That’s what’s happening here. This is Level 3 thinking and I really like it.

There’s a point in which all of our lives, I think and often many points would suggest, that conviction and desire come into contact and we have to make a choice. What are we going to do when that conviction and desire meet and we have to decide what we’re going to do?



There's a word that God uses to describe Himself that helps us understand what we should do. It's the word 'Lord.' Because we call God "Lord," He's the boss. So we need to give up our desires in order to serve Him and do those convictions. Is Christ Lord or is He convenience? Is it Jesus Christ Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ? Or a convenience Jesus Christ. It's really the Lord Jesus Christ that we serve. So we give up our agenda and we serve Him.

I love Esther's response. Look at verse 15: *Then 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 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."*

It reminds me there is a difference between preferences, beliefs, and convictions. Preference is "I like to go to church on Sunday morning ten o'clock. That's my choice for worship service." That's preference. A belief is "I think church is important. I'm going to go there." Conviction is "I'm going to church." Conviction always has action attached to it. We're coming to a place in her life where the actions are there.

You have to ask yourself what is the tipping point in your life where you say, "Okay. I've had enough. I'm going to take a stand for what's right in my life." I think this is a very practical thing because we have desires that happen in the course of our day. We know the conviction is "I should be kind to people. But I really want the remote control right now and somebody hid it" and so we start acting out of desire instead of conviction.

I think this is a daily thing, not just a major thing in Esther's life. Sometimes we're called upon to make major decisions. "I'm going to have to quit this job because it violates my convictions." Or "I'm going to have to make this hard decision in life because I have this conviction." Sometimes that happens. But many times it's the daily stuff that takes place in every part of our life.

Paul said in Philippians 1:21, *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* Those are easy words to say, but must have been rather a big part of Paul's life. God has become so much of who he is that the commitment level of Paul is really high.

I think that God is calling us in the midst of this kind of a story to question is our commitment level high enough or are we just kind of being convenient with God? Is He really the Lord of our life?

Years ago I heard this story and every once in a while when I think about it just motivates me in my own commitment before God. It's a story from the old Soviet Union.

One Sunday, all believers started to arrive inconspicuously in small groups so as not to arouse the suspicion of the KGB informers. By dusk they were all safely inside, windows closed and doors locked. They began by singing a hymn quietly but with deep emotion.

Suddenly the door was pushed open and in walked two soldiers with loaded automatic weapons ready. One shouted, "Alright. Everybody line up against the wall. If you wish to renounce your

commitment to Jesus Christ you may leave now.” Two or three quickly left. Then another. After a few more seconds, two more.

“This is your last chance. Either turn away from your faith in Christ,” he ordered, “or stay and suffer the consequences.” Another left. Finally two more in embarrassed silence with their faces covered slipped out into the night. No one else moved. Parents with small children trembling beside them looked down reassuringly. They fully expected to be gunned down or at best to be imprisoned.

After a few moments of complete silence, the other soldier closed the door, locked it, looked back at those who stood against the wall, and said, “Keep your hands up, but this time in praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. We too are Christians. We were sent to another house church several weeks to arrest a group of believers.” The other soldier interrupted, “Yes, but instead we were converted. We have learned by experience, however, that unless people are willing to die for their faith they cannot fully be trusted.”

Wow. Corrie ten Boom said, “I’ve learned that you have to hold everything loosely because it hurts when God has to pry it out of your hands.”

We’re tested in our lives every day. There are opportunities for us to say, “Lord, do I really believe in you? Do I really believe that you can take me through this situation?”

If you’re not a believer today, I just want you to know that when we talk about becoming a Christian, we’re not talking about just getting a Bible and putting it on your shelves so that you can call yourself something. We’re talking about total commitment of your life. We’re not eager to have people just attend a church who want to be part of a club. What we’ve done as believers here at Calvary Chapel Living Hope is that we’ve said, “I believe that Jesus is Lord. I want Him to control my life.” We’re continually working to allow God to do that more and more. It’s a challenge sometimes for us. We’re not perfect people.

But if you’re not saved today, you haven’t committed yourself to Jesus Christ the Lord, I want you to know what you’re getting into here. It’s total commitment, not just little commitment. This is major.

If you were to ask yourself, “If I were to die today, what would I say to God if He were to say to me, ‘On what basis do you think I should allow you to come into heaven?’” If the answer would be, “I’ve been such a good person, Lord. I bet you’ve been waiting for me to get up here,” then we’re missing something. We really need to recognize that the only answer that gets us into those heaven gates is the fact that I’ve trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

After we make that decision to accept Christ into our lives then it’s the daily working that out. “God, I want you to be Lord of my life.” It’s as if God takes all the keys that you have to all the life situations that you have. You’ve got all these keys to every door of your life and God says, “Okay. I want to be Lord of your life. Give me the keys. All of them.” And you say, “Okay God. Umm wow. That’s a hard one. I’ll give you all of them but this one. I’m going to keep this one.” The weakness that you have in your spiritual life will continue until you give over the last key.

We give over every key to God and we say, “God, I want you to be in control of every area. I’m not going to hold something back for a rainy day. I’m not going to say, ‘Lord, I don’t think you can handle this. I’m going to handle this myself.’ Lord, I’m going to give you everything. I’m going to serve you one hundred percent.” That is what it means to make Jesus Christ Lord of our lives.

This is a message not just for you if you come here and you’re not saved, but I welcome you to make that decision today. It’ll transform your life, obviously. But it’s really a decision for all of us that we raise our commitment level. What’s the most important thing in our life? Is it Jesus? That’s what it needs to be as we continue on.

Let’s pray.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you for the privilege that we have to be called your children, but it comes with such a huge price tag. It comes with such an awesome responsibility and privilege. And so today, Lord, we are coming before you and we’re just thanking you again for your mercy and for your grace and recognizing that it’s only because of your grace that we’re able to be here this morning, to be healthy today, to be facing the challenges that we have to face this week. It’s because of your grace that we carry on every day. So we dedicate ourselves, we commit ourselves to you. Be honored, Lord, in everything that we do. Be honored in this worship now as we offer up to you our praise and our dedication and our service in our hearts to you. In Jesus’ name, amen.