

July 12, 2020

Finding Courage to Give Up Your Dreams For the Greater Good

Sermon Text: Esther (Selected Verses)

Sermon Summary

This message looks closely at the story of Esther and how God placed her and her older first cousin, Mordica, in just the right places at just the right time to save the Jewish people from annihilation! The details of how God worked all things together to bring about a positive outcome for His people is nothing short of miraculous! Twelve lessons are gleaned from this story that have profound practical implications and applications for our lives today. Here are the snippets of the story that are used for the 12 lessons: Est 1:1-12, Est 1:15-20, Est 2:1-4, Est 2:5-17, Est 2:21-23, Est 3:1-4:5, Est 4:6-11, Est 4:12-14, Est 4:15-5:3, Est 5:9-13, Est 6:1-10, Est 6:12-17:6. Lesson 9 is the sermon title stating that we must find the courage to give up our dreams for a greater good!

Full Sermon Notes

“If You're not in it, then I don't want it, let all else fade away Take the whole world, give me Jesus, let all else fade away” Today we're going to talk about a story where a woman was confronted with an epic decision. A decision that would place her dreams, her future, her very life, at risk! God calls us to dream, to dream big, we talked about that last week. However, God sometimes calls us to be willing to give up those dreams for a bigger, more important purpose! When that happens, our faith, our beliefs, and our trust in God's motives, are all put to the test. It's easy to believe, trust and have faith when things are going great in life. What will you do when things get tough, when you're challenged? Let's pray and ask God to make us teachable today! Pray!

By way of introduction I want to acknowledge that there are several things with the book of Esther which are hotly debated by scholars, commentators, historians, and theologians. There are some language difficulties in translating certain passages in the book and some issues with determining actual dates for the story. As a result your translation may call the king Ahauerus or Xerxes. Some translations speak of 50 foot high gallows and some speak of 50 foot high poles, which were used for executions. None of these things change or effect the spiritual lessons the writer was trying to convey to us. And speaking of the writer, we don't know who that was! But we do know God inspired someone to write down this story because it has powerful lessons for God's people! When we are looking at Old Testament writings, we must remember the intent and message of the writer was usually focused more on the spiritual message than the chronological dating of events. The book of Esther is like a mini novel. And even though it's very short, I obviously won't have time to read the whole thing. What I'm going to do is take the main portions of the story and grab some very important take home life lessons for us. Now, because of the mature nature of some of the content, I'm going to handle those things carefully because we are so blessed to have our children with us today! Kiddos, today's story is pretty fascinating and I hope you will be inspired by what you hear and with the activity packets Lacey has made for you! So let's just dive right into the story...

Lesson 1 - Multiple Lessons

Est 1:1 This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush :

Est 1:2 At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,

Est 1:3 and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

Est 1:4 For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

Est 1:5 When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa.

Est 1:6 The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones.

Est 1:7 Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality.

Est 1:8 By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

Est 1:9 Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

Est 1:10 On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him--Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas--

Est 1:11 to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.

Est 1:12 But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

Boy, we could just camp out here and have a whole sermon. We could talk about wrong priorities, and searching for happiness in things! What a list of treasures! Archeologists have actually confirmed the accuracy of this part of the story as they have unearthed many of these treasures! Lesson learned, you can't take it with you! Paul would later say...

1 Tim 6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

And there was the extravagance and being a show off! The original party the king threw lasted 180 days! The focus then turns to the grand finale of the last seven days, where we see substance abuse, and the attempt by the king to objectify his wife as he wished to parade her in front of his party goers. What a sad thing when a relationship is simply built on outward beauty and goes no deeper! When a person sees their spouse as a trophy won rather than as a gift and a blessing from God and as a companion and friend for life! And then of course we could talk about Queen Vashti taking a stand and refusing to be objectified! Of course, I don't know if that

was the reason she refused, she may have just been angry with her husband, the Bible doesn't tell us. However, the takeaway is this: there are times when a person needs to stand for their rights. Of course, the drunken king was not at all happy with the stand she took and he burned with anger! A whole sermon could be preached on the issues with anger and its consequences, but let's continue our story.

The King consults with his wise men on what to do about the queen's refusal to obey the king and they give him some advice, which leads us to another lesson to be learned from our story...

Lesson 2 - Be Careful Who You Listen To

Est 1:15 "According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her."

Est 1:16 Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes.

Est 1:17 For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.'

Est 1:18 This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

Est 1:19 "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.

Est 1:20 Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest."

Worst marriage counselors ever! These wise men and their spokesman simply wanted to bolster their ungodly control over their own wives. I can say ungodly because these guys were the kind of men who demanded respect because of their position as husbands, not because they had earned respect by being dedicated and loving husbands. I've said this many times, if you demand respect or expect people to follow you because of your position, and you've not earned the respect because of who you are as a person, then your leadership will be weak, ineffective and will only survive by abusing your power over others! Men, we're supposed to be spiritual leaders of our family not dictators!

Lesson 3 - Decisions Have Consequences

Est 2:1 Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

Est 2:2 Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king.

Est 2:3 Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them.

Est 2:4 Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

I know I'm reading a little between the lines here, but it says when the King's anger subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. He had banished her by royal decree! It was an absolute principle to the Persians that a king's decree could not be revoked. That principle will explain some other things later in our story. I think he was missing his queen and realized there was no longer any hope of reconciliation. In his drunken anger, he had made a decision that had lasting consequences. I also think his wise men saw that he was troubled, and they may have gotten worried, since they had been the ones to give him the advice to banish her. So they quickly come up with a plan to help the king find another queen. One thing we have to remember here is that God can use all circumstances, even the bad ones, to bring about ultimate good! And he does that in this story in amazing ways. By the way, the plan of the wise men was to have a beauty contest and allow the king to choose a new queen. God was going to use this situation strategically to provide for the survival of His people.

Lesson 4 - God Works in All Circumstances

Est 2:5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,

Est 2:6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

Est 2:7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Est 2:8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

Est 2:9 The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Est 2:10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

Est 2:11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Est 2:16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Est 2:17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Now I want to read one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible. It's a New Testament verse, but it will help us to see what is happening in this Old Testament story.

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

It is amazing to see the amazing detail of God's divine providence as He works all things together for the good of His people during this time in history. Beginning with the Babylonian exile, God was working things out for Mordicia and his young cousin Esther to be in just the right place at the right time for a miraculous work of God. Esther's parents had died and Mordicia took Esther in and raised her as his own daughter. Esther is chosen to be a part of the royal beauty contest. She immediately wins the favor of the eunuch in charge and is given special care. In the tenth month of the contest Esther is brought before the King and instantly wins his heart and the contest is over. And the winner is...Esther from the great state of...! Wait, Mordicia had told her not to tell where she was from and evidently the king didn't even think to ask, because she had won his heart regardless. This would prove to be another very strategic detail in the story. You're going to see this lesson throughout the rest of today's story. In fact, watch how God uses Mordicia's trusted position as gatekeeper for good...

Lesson 5 - Don't Underestimate the Importance of Your Work in God's Plan

Est 2:21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

Est 2:22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

Est 2:23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Mordicia evidently had a job as gatekeeper for the palace and he checked on Esther every day. Gatekeeper would prove to be an extremely important position for God's plan as we see that Mordicia discovers a plot against the king. You would think that Mordecai would have been recognized or something for saving the king from a potential assassination plot. It's like somebody just forgot, but God was orchestrating everything and the timing for a greater purpose! You might think the job you do is insignificant, but God may have you in just the right place, for just the right reason, for just the right time. Paul said this in Galatians 6:9...

Gal 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

And here's something you must trust God with, the timing of the harvest. With Mordecai someone else gets elevated to a higher position who turns out to be a terrible villain, a really bad guy! Check this out...

Lesson 6 - Sometimes Things Just Don't Make Sense

Est 3:1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

Est 3:2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Est 3:3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"

Est 3:4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

Est 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.

Est 3:6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

So a really bad guy gets the promotion! Mordecai is not even recognized for saving the king. Mordecai refuses to bow down and pay homage to Haman and even Mordecai's co-workers turn on him and tell Haman that Mordecai was a Jew. How bad is Haman? Bad...

Est 3:8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

Est 3:9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."

Est 3:10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Est 3:11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

Est 3:14 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

Est 3:15 Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

Est 4:1 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.

Est 4:2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.

Est 4:3 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.

Est 4:4 When Esther's maids and eunuchs 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.

Est 4:5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

Lesson 7 - Sometimes The Answer You Get is Not the Answer You Wanted

Est 4:6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Est 4:7 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.

Est 4:8 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 urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Est 4:9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.

Est 4:10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai,

Est 4:11 "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 he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

So Esther is faced with an epic decision. She is living the dream as Queen. She knows what had happened to the former queen and she knows going into the king's presence uninvited could be seen as disrespectful and unsubmitive. She could be killed. She has reason to be concerned because she had not been called in to see the King for a month. Mordecai sends a very stark, yet very important message back to her and in his words we discover yet another life lesson...

Lesson 8 - Find Courage to Acknowledge God Has a Plan

Est 4:12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai,

Est 4:13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape.

Est 4:14 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. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Mordecai reminds Esther that she was also under the King's edict put out by Haman and no matter how much the king loved her, he would not be able to go against the edict. Mordecai then states that if she were to choose not to act on behalf of God's people that deliverance for God's people would still happen. In other words, God had a backup plan, but Esther was placed in her position for such a time as this! The Psalmist said...

Psa 33:11 But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

With that in mind you must...

Lesson 9 - Find the Courage to Give Up Your Dreams for the Greater Good!

Est 4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

Est 4:16 "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 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."

Such amazing faith. And even though the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther or the word prayer, the Jewish people all knew that fasting and prayer went hand in hand and that prayer and fasting would make no sense at all if there were no God to recognize the fasting or to hear the prayer! The people reading this story understood this was a testimony of the Covenant God of Israel keeping His covenant promise with His people and making a way for them to be saved. After the three day prayer and fasting, Esther takes a walk of faith...

Est 5:1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance.

Est 5:2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

Est 5:3 Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

Queen Esther requested the King's presence, along with Haman, at a banquet she would prepare for them. At the banquet, the King asked her again what she wanted, and promised her up to half the kingdom. She requested that he and Haman attend a second banquet.

Lesson 10 - Dreams that are Totally Self Based Never Satisfy and Lead to Destruction

Est 5:9 Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

Est 5:10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife,

Est 5:11 Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials.

Est 5:12 "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow.

Est 5:13 But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

Self Centered, worldly dreams will always leave you without satisfaction. Enough is never enough! The writer of Ecclesiastes put it this way...

Ecc 5:10 Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

This is true of not just money, but with any worldly thing in which you might try to find satisfaction. This world just can't fill the God shaped hole that is in your spiritual heart!

Lesson 11 - God Is Always Working in the Background

Est 6:1 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.

Est 6:2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

Est 6:3 "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

Est 6:4 The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him.

Est 6:5 His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered.

Est 6:6 When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"

Est 6:7 So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor,

Est 6:8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head.

Est 6:9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

Est 6:10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

Lesson 12 - Selfish Living Loses, Selfless Living Wins

Est 6:12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief,

Est 6:13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him--you will surely come to ruin!"

Est 6:14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Est 7:1 So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther,

Est 7:2 and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

Est 7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life--this is my petition. And spare my people--this is my request.

Est 7:4 For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

Est 7:5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

Est 7:6 Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

Haman had every reason to be terrified. He lost everything he had selfishly gained as well as his life. But remember that the King had allowed Haman to make an edict calling for the destruction of the Jews, and that edict could not be rescinded by Persian law. So the King had Esther and Mordecai draft another edict that allowed the Jews to protect themselves when they were attacked. They did, and they were overwhelmingly victorious.

Of all the lessons we have learned today, this last lesson, **Selfish Living Loses, Selfless Living Wins** is one of the most important. Jesus had this to say...

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Mat 16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Mat 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Let's Pray!!

