

## Esther 5. Taking a risk, with courage, wisdom and faith. 9<sup>th</sup> Nov 2025

### Prayer:

***On the third day*** Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace.

Where does your mind go as I read 'on the third day'? Mine automatically goes to Jesus' words to his disciples when he tells them of his coming death and resurrection. Words we say in the Nicene Creed. In Luke 18: 32-33, Jesus says this of being handed over to the Gentiles...*They will mock him, insult him, and spit on him, they will flog him and kill him.*

***On the third day*** he will rise again.

The disciples forgot until later, but those words 'On the third day he will rise again', give such hope after the horror of what comes before.

Now there is not a direct parallel here, deliverance to Esther and all the Jews in Persia does not come on the third day, but there is hope as she goes to the King with courage and faith, taking a risk for the sake of her people. She did not know the outcome as she stepped into the inner court of the palace.

Jesus faced suffering and death as he stepped forward in faith to save his people, all who will believe in him. He placed himself in the Father's hands as he was handed over to death. While he trusted that indeed he would rise again on the third day, he also suffered emotionally as he takes his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane to pray with him in preparation for what was to come. He pleaded with God, 'if it is possible, take this cup from me, but not my will, yours be done'.

So, what is this third day when Esther goes to the King?

A quick catch up for those who missed last week. This is the third day since Esther heard from her cousin Mordecai that an edict had gone out from the evil Haman to kill all the Jews in Persia in the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the year. Mordecai and Esther were among the many Jews living in Susa and all the 127 Provinces of Persia since the Babylonian exile.

Mordecai seemed to work in the King's palace, he even saved the King from an assassination plot, (info to hold onto for next week). He had been caring for his orphaned young cousin Esther until she was taken to the palace and chosen by the King to be his Queen. Mordecai had told her to keep her ethnicity quiet.

Haman, an Agagite, is one of the King's nobles who has been promoted to a higher position to anyone else. Mordecai refused to bow to him, and we discovered last week that there was old enmity between the Israelites and the Amalekites. Mordecai a descendant of King Saul, and Haman a descendant of King Agag. You can read about this conflict in 1 Samuel 15.

Haman hates the Jews and when he finds out that Mordecai does not bow to him, he cunningly makes the King agree to annihilate not just Mordecai but all the Jews, without the King even knowing who has agreed to wipe out. He just gave Haman his cygnet ring and all the power that goes with it. Dangerous!

There is much weeping and wailing among the Jews, and Mordecai pleads with Esther to go to the King seeking mercy, for as he says to her...*And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?*

Esther replies that she hasn't been summoned to the King in over 30 days, and she may be killed if she goes without an invitation. But she agrees to go, with the hope that the King will hold out his golden sceptre to her when he sees her. She says I will go, but *if I perish I perish*.

She calls on Mordecai to call all the Jews in Susa to fast for 3 days, while she and her attendants also fast in preparation for her going to the King. This book does not mention God, but we can only assume that prayer went hand in hand with the fasting. Praying to God for strength and courage and a positive outcome for the Jews.

So, it was after 3 days of prayer and fasting preparation that Esther goes to the King. She takes care with her appearance and puts on her royal robes. This in contrast to the sackcloth that the Jews in the city were wearing. But Esther is wise in her choice, she knows that the King loves beauty and wealth and needed to be reminded of his attraction to Esther. I can only presume she also prepared herself with oils and perfume! In chapter 2 we heard of the 12 months of beauty treatment the young virgins were succumbed to before going to the King!

As Esther goes to stand in the inner court of the palace, she does not know what the outcome will be. Will the King despise her coming without invitation and send her to her death, or will he extend his golden sceptre?

Sometimes we may be called to step out and take a risk not knowing what the outcome will be. We read in Romans 8: 28 that *all things work together for good, for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*.

It was becoming clear that God had indeed placed Mordecai and Esther in their positions according to his purpose, but still the outcome was not assured. She had to step out in faith. We are not guaranteed freedom from pain and loss, and yet we are called to be faithful, and to trust in God.

Esther's wisdom in her approach, preparation of fasting and then dressing to please the King are rewarded with him extending the golden sceptre. She has again won his favour. We know that this is all part of God's purposes.

The King will know that she has come with some request, as her action was highly unusual, and so he asks what her petition is. But even before she replies, he offers her anything up to half of his Kingdom!

We might wonder at her reply, why doesn't she come out with her plea for mercy while she has his favour and he has offered her half his kingdom? (Though that was probably not an offer to be taken literally from the King)

Esther is wise and doesn't rush her request. It would not have been helpful to plead her cause in the public arena. We can only presume that the Lord is guiding her in her communication with the King. Just as Jesus said to his disciples as we heard in our Matthew 10 reading this morning, Esther is shrewd, and surely the Holy Spirit is speaking through her, giving her courage and wisdom.

Esther knows she must continue to curry the King's favour. She knows he loves an attractive looking woman, but so too he loves banquets, good food and wine. So, she invites him and Haman to a banquet that very day. '*If it pleases the King*' she says demurely. Of course it pleases him, he doesn't question why the invitation is for Haman also, but he hurries to carry out her request. She is keeping her enemy Haman close by...

When we have important issues to share or communicate, it is helpful to consider who it is we are talking to, to be culturally sensitive, to be patient, to develop a congenial atmosphere where important matters can be discussed.

After the meal and they are sitting back with full bellies and another glass of wine, the King asks what her petition is again and reiterates his offer of up to half the kingdom.

But again, she does not immediately come out with her request. She obviously has the sense (prompted by God we believe) that the timing is not yet right. Whether it is just the Lord guiding her on the spot, or he gave her wisdom to execute a well thought out strategy, she pauses and is seeking the best possible outcome.

She repeats his words, that if it pleases the King to grant her petition and request, then please come with Haman to another banquet I will give tomorrow.

We are left in tension as we must wait another night to find out the outcome of this scenario.

Then the chapter shifts to focus on the story of the evil villain Haman. He is feeling chuffed as he leaves the banquet he has attended as the only other guest with the King.

We see immediately how emotionally labile and needy Haman is. He goes from being in high spirits to being filled with rage when he notes that Mordecai still refuses to bow to him when he passed him at the Kings gate.

When he gets home he calls his friends and his wife and boasts about his wealth, his sons, about how the King has honoured and elevated him and finally tells them how Queen Esther invited just him with the King to a banquet! This guy has a huge ego. I'm feeling sorry for his wife who would have heard all except for the last story before!

But then he says all that gives him no satisfaction while Mordecai sits at the King's gate and pays him no honour.

Do we ever respond like Haman? We might have many good and positive things going on in our lives, but we can get fixated on the one thing that is going wrong! When we do that, we can end up depressed and making bad decisions, just like Haman is about to do.

His wife Zeresh and his friends suggest that he get rid of Haman so that he won't bother him anymore. Don't wait months till the edict for the Jews' annihilation comes about, just get rid of him now! They tell him to have a high pole (about 23 metres tall!) set up and ask the King to impale Mordecai on it in the morning, then you can really enjoy yourself at Esther's second banquet. Haman was thrilled with this idea, no doubt wondering why he hadn't thought of it himself. He is usually the one giving evil advice!

Interestingly the idea seemed to come from his wife. Another ironic reversal in this story. Remember the edict in the first chapter that every man should be ruler in his own household? I wonder if Zeresh was the ruler in this household?! He certainly followed her suggestion. And why did she suggest it? Was it to stop him from whingeing about Mordecai?!

At the end of chapter 5 we are left in tension once again, not knowing the outcome of Esther's plea to the King, having to wait for the second banquet. And we are left wondering if Mordecai will be killed before she gets to ask the King, and that would be so sad and hard for Esther, even if she manages to save the rest of the Jews.

In this chapter we have seen Esther's wisdom, in complete contrast to Haman's foolishness.

Many proverbs come to mind as we consider these two.

Proverbs 13: 16 *All who are prudent act with knowledge, but fools expose their folly.*

15:29 *The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.*

Or 17:27 *The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.*

Are we wise or foolish in our speech and actions?

Today's chapter should encourage us to take risks in stepping forward in faith, just as Esther did as she went before the King. She didn't know what the outcome was going to be, but it didn't stop her from going. She was prepared after a time of fasting and prayer, she was wise in her presentation and speech, but still it would have taken much courage. If the Lord calls us to act according to his purposes, then we do so knowing that he is with us, and we can only trust him, even as we don't know the outcome.

I picked up this book on the Mercy Ships at our book sale last week. A great story of a man, Don Stephens with a great vision. There is one chapter that I read this week as a perfect example of God working his purposes out, and of Don taking a risk and stepping out in faith not knowing what the outcome would be. After buying the first ship, it spent a few years docked in Greece as they were fitting it out. There was an earthquake while they were there, and Don and the crew helped the locals. There was a young teenager who spent time with them and was given a bible. A few years later while docked in the United States Don hears from a Greek Pastor friend that he and Don had been charged and summoned to court, but because Don was not a Greek national, he didn't have to attend. The charge was for proselytising and attempted psychological abduction of a minor. He contemplated not going, but in his heart he knew the case had no real basis and he had to go and support his friend. He went not knowing what the outcome would be. They were found guilty. He was given his passport back and he could choose again whether to return when the appeal came up. During this time he garnered international support. At the second hearing he if found guilty he would have been imprisoned for up to 3 years. But this time with people from International human rights, and Greek Orthodox Priests giving evidence they were found not guilty. Don took a risk not knowing the outcome, God used him in working his purposes out and over time laws were changed in Greece. Previously protestants and Catholics couldn't be schoolteachers or officers in the Greek army. After this case things began to change.

There are countless Christians living in countries where they are persecuted for their faith, but that does not stop them from standing up for what they believe in. Many are martyred. God calls us to be faithful. And we can thank Jesus for his faithfulness in going to his death on the cross, rising again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that we might have life, even if we die.

Tune in next week as we are drawn into the ongoing tension of this fascinating story of Esther. We will continue to see God's providential hand at work.

May we be strong and courageous and wise, trusting in God to use us for his purposes. Who knows when we might be called upon to speak up for injustice, or just to proclaim our

faith in Jesus in a secular world. Or maybe he is calling us to trust him in other circumstances we find ourselves in life; work, finances, health, family.

Let's pray: Faithful God, help us to put our trust in you, to take risks for your sake. Give us wisdom in our communication, just as Esther was wise. Remind us that while we are sent out among the wolves, your Holy Spirit will lead us and guide us and give us words to say. We thank you that even when it seems all might be lost, your sovereign hand is at work, often behind the scenes, working your purposes out. Amen.