

If I Perish, I Perish

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When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; ² he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³ In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷ and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. ⁹ Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹ "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." ¹² When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³ Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." ¹⁵ Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. (Esther 4:1-17)

1. Many Heroines in the Bible

Today as we celebrate Mothers' Day, we remember the many notable women in the Bible. Sarah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth and Naomi, Hannah, Mary, Elizabeth, and Mary Magdalene are just some of the many women who play an important role in the history of the Bible. One of my favorite women is Esther. Esther was a woman of faith and was willing to risk her life for her people.

2. Book of Esther Summary

The story of Esther is set in the Persian Empire in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire. The Queen Vashti refuses to obey her husband, King Xerxes. The queen is banished and King Xerxes begins a search for a new queen. He brings many beautiful women into the royal harem. Esther, a young Jewish woman, is chosen by the King and is made queen of the empire.

We know from her background that Esther is an orphan. She is raised by her cousin, Mordecai. Mordecai becomes a government official and uncovers a plot to kill the king and allows Esther to warn the king just in time.

Haman, the second-in-command, at the time, becomes furious when Mordecai refuses to bow to him. Haman determines to find a way to destroy Mordecai and the Jews with him. Through a lot of effort, Haman persuades the King to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire.

We know that at this point, King Xerxes doesn't know that Queen Esther is a Jew. Mordecai sits outside the palace gates, wailing and covered in sackcloth. Mordecai shares the edict from the King with Esther and urges her to go and beg for mercy.

Esther sends her messenger to tell Mordecai that she cannot go to the King without the king's summons. Mordecai replies, "***if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this***" (verse 14).

Esther decides to go to king to save her people. She says to Mordecai, "***After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish***" (verse 16). Esther fasts for three days. Although she is afraid of her likely death, Esther approaches King Xerxes unannounced. But instead of facing death, the King offers Esther up to half of the kingdom as a way to say she can have anything that she wants.

Queen Esther requests a banquet. Meanwhile, Haman is excited at his plan to kill Mordecai. He plans to hang Mordecai the next day. Haman's plans are dashed when the following morning, the king orders Haman to honor Mordecai through a parade.

At the second banquet, Esther asks the king to punish Haman for plotting to kill her and her people. The king hangs Haman on the same gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai.

The Jews of Persia are granted the right to turn against Haman's agents and supporters, and Mordecai is made a king's counselor and Purim is established as Jewish holiday to remember this day.

3. God Behind the Scenes

The primary purpose of the Book of Esther is to explain the dramatic origins of the feast of Purim. Although the author of the book of Esther is not known, he reminds us that the events in the Persian city of Susa threatens the continuity of God's purposes in redemptive history. The interesting thing is that an explicit reference to God, worship, prayer, or sacrifice is not mentioned in the book. That is why both Jews and Christians debated about whether the Book of Esther should be included in the biblical canon or not.

Although the explicit reference to God in the Book is absent, God's sovereignty and his loving care for his people is clearly summarized in Mordecai's exhortation to Esther: ***Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this*** (4:14).

When Esther hears this statement from Mordecai, she replies, ***I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish*** (4:16). The story of Esther reminds us of the prayer that Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to being crucified on the cross. Jesus prays: ***My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want*** (Matthew 26:39). Jesus affirms that his desire is to do God's will.

4. Mother's Image of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit

As we read and reflect on this passage this morning, I want to point out the conviction of Esther's heart when she says, "If I perish, I perish." We see in the passage the image of a woman who trusts in the Lord and is willing to sacrifice anything to try and help save her people. This is the same conviction that we see in parents and especially in mothers. This conviction reflects the core image of Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says in Matthew 23:37. ***Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!***

We find in the passage that Jesus uses the image of a hen and her young to reflect the very intimate relationship between Jesus and his people. Jesus refers him as a hen, the image of mothering bird who gathers her young under her wings.

We see this same heart in Deuteronomy 32:18 that in the NIV reads, “***you deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth.***” The writer uses the image of a parent (both mother and father) to illustrate the heart of God.

Finally, in John 14:15, we read the passage, which says, “***I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.***” The translation for the term “advocate” is “parakletos” in Greek. The meaning of “parakletos” is “called to one’s side.” “Parakletos” means “mediator, helper, counselor, & comforter.” In using this term, the writer is highlighting God’s intent to send us a comforter that will stand besides us and go with us in life. This is the Holy Spirit.

We see God as a father. However, quite often in the Bible, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are described as a caring mother who gives birth, love, and comfort to the children.

5. Conclusion

What does the story of Esther teach us? Esther faced a suicide mission when she approached the King Xerxes to beg for mercy for her people. When Esther sees the depth of the problem, she resolves to be willing to give up her life for the sake of her people. Here we see Esther’s faith and trust in the Lord and she ultimately saves her people and herself. Esther has been used by God to save God’s people.

6. Application

Last week, eighteen-year-old Kendrick Castillo was killed in a shooting at a Colorado high school. The shooting took place five miles from Columbine High School, the site of one of the country’s most devastating school shootings 20 years ago. During the shooting, Kendrick lunged himself at the gunman, allowing other students to run to safety and escape. Kendrick’s father said that hiding was not part of Kendrick’s character. He always wanted to protect and help people. Because of Kendrick many students are alive today.

The story of Queen Esther and of people like Kendrick Castillo give us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate Mother’s Day, we remember the love of our Lord shown in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and in our mothers and in those who sacrificed their lives for us. I believe our mothers would want us to live our lives in such a way as Esther says, “If I perish, I perish” to share the love of God with others. Amen.