

ESTHER



Today we are continuing our series, “People in the Bible You Should Know.” We’re going to consider another amazing woman. Her name is Hadassah. How many know Hadassah of the Bible?

Oh, how I’d love for you to meet Hadassah in person. But since she lived in the fifth century BC, we’ll have to be content with reading about her in the book which bears her name—her other name—the book of Esther.

Today we look at a person and a book. Ten chapters. Takes about 20 min to read. You should read this book, maybe today.

And what a book it is! Hollywood would have a challenge matching the drama of this story . . .

- the evil Haman who demanded that all pay him homage
- the gutsy Mordecai who refused to bow before Haman . . .
- Mordecai’s great words to Esther that she may have been chosen queen for *“such a time as this”* . . .
- and Esther’s conviction to save her people. *“If I perish, I perish,”* she resolved.

Book often ignored. Why? Because in it, God or even his name is not directly mentioned. But that’s one reason I love it. It’s like real life. Most days, God does not *seem* to intervene in a miraculous way. God doesn’t directly speak or act... but He is there. We may not see him, in this book, but His fingerprints are on every page. They are also on every page of our lives, but too often we don’t notice them. And YOUR life, as we will see here today is a drama that involves not only you, but God, the Holy Spirit, the Devil who, and a kingdom-sized plan that God is seeking to work out in and through your life. But the Devil also has a plan and he will be trying to get you to help him.

Today I want to talk about God *hearing and answering prayer*. We will see that today.

When I am with my children and they “Daddy, can you help me?” Or “Can you give me something?” - I

have to admit, now as well as when they were younger, in the end, if I can do it, and I know it’s not bad for them, my response usually ends up “Yes.”

I think most of all, I am moved to respond because they call me “Daddy.” Because he/she is my child, I hear their request.

Because we are His children, God hears our requests too. God is not only willing to hear us, he loves to hear us. He even tells us what to ask him.

Big things. Lofty things like Jesus instructed us, *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

THY KINGDOM COME

Let’s face it, too often we don’t really pray like we should. Tonight we are starting a study on prayer and walking with God and we need it. I need it.

Our prayers are so small. We enter the throne room of God with a bag full of requests—promotions desired, pay raises wanted, transmission repairs needed, and tuitions due. We’d typically say our prayers as casually as we’d order a burger at the drive-through: *“I’ll have one solved problem and two blessings, cut the hassles, please.”*

But such smallness seems inappropriate in the presence of Almighty God. Here we are before the King of kings. The pay raise is still needed and the promotion is still desired, but is that where we start?

Jesus tells how to begin. *“When you pray, pray like this. ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. That is: ‘Come, my King! Take your throne in our land. Be present in my heart. Be present in my office. Come into my marriage. Be Lord of my family, my fears, and my doubts.’”* This is no feeble request; it’s a bold appeal for God to occupy every corner of your life.

Isn’t that what you want? Of course it is. But who are you to ask such things? Who are you to ask God to take control of your world? You are **his child**, that’s who you are! And so you ask boldly. *“So let us come boldly to the very throne*

of God to receive his mercy and grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

A SPIRITUAL DRAMA

A wonderful illustration of this kind of boldness in prayer is in the story of Esther. Though her language and culture are worlds apart from ours, she can tell you about the power of a prayer to a king.

There are a couple of differences, though. Her request was not to her Father, but to her husband, the king. Her prayer wasn't for a raise, but for the delivery of her people. And because she entered the throne room, because she opened her heart to the king, he changed his plans and millions of people in 195 different countries were saved (number of countries in the world).

Let's review the central characters.

Xerxes was the king of Persia. Israel was in captivity to the Persians. He was an *absolute* monarch over the land from India to Ethiopia. Whatever he said, goes. In this respect he symbolized the power of GOD.

Haman (whose name sounds like hangman, which you will soon see as more than a curious coincidence) was the right-hand man of Xerxes. Read every word about the man and you'll find nothing good about him. He was an insatiable egotist who wanted the worship of every person in the kingdom. He had a particular hatred for the Jews, so, like Adolph Hitler, he decided to exterminate them. He convinced Xerxes that the world would be better with a holocaust and set a date for the genocide of all of Abraham's children.

Haman is a servant of hell and a picture of the devil himself, who has no higher aim than to have every knee bow as he passes. Satan also has no other plan than to persecute the promised people of God. He comes to *"steal and kill and destroy"* (John 10:10). *"He is filled with anger, because he knows he does not have much time"* (Rev. 12:12).

Ever since the lie in the garden, the Devil has sought to derail God's plan. In this case Satan hopes to destroy the Jews, thereby destroying the lineage of Jesus – and end the hope for a Savior. For Haman, the massacre is a matter of expediency. For Satan, it is a matter of survival.

He will do whatever it takes to impede the presence of Jesus in the world.

That's why he doesn't want you to pray the way you are enabled to as a child of God (tonight begins our Prayer Study "Follow Me.")

Esther (Hadassah), is a young Jewish girl, Mordecai's adopted daughter, who became queen by winning a Miss Persia contest. In one day she went from obscurity to royalty, and in more ways than one she should remind you of YOU.

- Both of you are residents of the palace: Esther, the bride of Xerxes and you, the bride of Christ.
- Both of you have access to the throne of the king, and you both have a counselor to guide and teach you.

Your counselor is the Holy Spirit. Esther's counselor was **Mordecai**.

Mordecai had earlier prevented the assassination of the King, but never took credit for it. He also urged Esther to keep secret her Jewish nationality before the impending massacre. You may wonder why she would need any encouragement. Listen to the situation from the lips of Esther:

Esther 4:11 *"No man or woman may go to the king in the inner courtyard without being called. There is only one law about this: Anyone who enters must be put to death unless the king holds out his gold scepter. Then that person may live. And I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days."*

As strange as it may sound to us, not even the queen could approach the king without an invitation. To enter his throne room uninvited was to risk a visit to the gallows. But Mordecai convinces her to take the risk. If you wonder why I see Mordecai as a picture of the HOLY SPIRIT, watch how he encourages her to do what is right. *"Just because you think you live in the king's palace, don't think that out of all the Jewish people you alone will escape. If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people, but you and your father's family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for such a time as this"* (Est. 4:13-14).

THE REST OF THE STORY

[Chapter 5] Watch how Esther responds. *"Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner courtyard of the king's palace, facing the king's hall"* (Est. 5:1).

Can't you see her? Right off the cover of *Elle* magazine? Can't you see King Xerxes? Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Esther.

"When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he was pleased" (5:2). Let me give you my translation of that verse: "When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard he said, "Oh Mannnn!"— *"He held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand, so Esther went forward and touched the end of it"* (5:2).

What follows is the rapid collapse of Satan's deck of cards.

Haman [Chapter 3] had this scheme to string up Mordecai, the only man who won't grovel at his feet. Xerxes unknowing approves it, as well as an order to kill all the Jews in his kingdom.

[Chapter 6] Seemingly out of nowhere the King, who couldn't sleep, happened to be reading that court annuals, only to discover that Mordecai, a Jew, had earlier saved his life. He realized that he was never thanked so he plans a great celebration to honor his heroism.

[Chapter 7] After fasting, Esther plans to throw a couple of banquets for Xerxes and Haman. At the end of the second banquet Xerxes begs Esther to ask for something. Esther looks sort of sheepishly at the floor and says, *"Well, now that you mention it, there is one eensy weensy favor I've been wanting to ask."* And she proceeds to inform the king about a raging anti-Semite who was hell-bent on killing her Jewish friends like rats, which Xerxes now realizes means he was about to lose his bride if he didn't act soon, *"and you don't want that, do you honey?"*

Xerxes demands the name of the murderer. Esther spills the beans, "it's Haman", and Xerxes loses his cool. He storms out, only to return and find Haman at the feet of Esther. Haman is begging for mercy, but the king thinks he's making a move on the queen. And before Haman has a chance to explain, he's headed to the same gallows he'd built for Mordecai.

Haman gets Mordecai's rope. And Mordecai

get Haman's job.

In the end, the Jews live to see another day, and the lineage of the Messiah is preserved.

And we get a dramatic reminder of what happens when we dare to approach our King.

If YOU are a child of the King...

- Like Esther, you have been plucked out of obscurity and given a place in the palace.
- Like Esther, you have royal robes; she was dressed in cloth, we are dressed in righteousness.
- Like Esther, we have the privilege of making our requests to a God who wants to **Philippians 4:19** *...meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

But like I said at the beginning, we too often treat this privilege in a small and almost petty way. We pray for little things but forget the bigger, greater things.

Maybe that's because we don't see the spiritual drama that we too are caught up in. Maybe Esther can help us. Just a young woman who seeming got caught up in a situation that she had nothing to do with. But it's clear that the providential, sovereign hand of God had clearly placed her there for *"such a time as this."*

Do you realize that:

I. "GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE."

Just like God had a plan for Esther's life. And she stepped up in faith and action and embraced it.

God has a plan for YOUR life. Not ten years from now, or a week from now, but today and tomorrow and tomorrow.

II. BUT THE DEVIL ALSO HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE...

Like Haman, He comes to *"steal and kill and destroy."*

Here, Satan hatched a plan to kill the entire population of Jews. Satan knew that if he could wipe out the Jews, he would spoil God's plan of salvation for the world.

60% of Americans don't believe in the Devil. They think he is just a symbol of evil.

How can that be? Look, nowhere in the book of Esther is Satan mentioned, but when you study the footprints you can plainly see his handiwork. As I said earlier, Esther doesn't mention God either, but you can plainly see God was definitely at work to bring salvation to His people.

- Do you recall that King Herod ordered all the baby boys born in Bethlehem during the time of Christ's birth to be killed. Who do you suppose put that idea in his head? Hmmmmm?

- Satan thought he was finally successful the day they nailed Jesus to the Cross at Calvary. Oh, was he in for a surprise!

Satan has a plan for your life – his plan is to stop you from achieving God's intended purpose for your life. He wants nothing better than to kill you, rob you and destroy your soul.

He wants to steal the moments and days and years of your life – and get you to waste them, missing the plans God has for you.

III. BUT HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS, LIKE ESTHER, WE HAVE A CHOICE.

The only thing Esther had to do for the Devil to accomplish his plan – was to do NOTHING.

Mordecai was right, Esther had indeed been chosen for just this time. She would be the instrument through which God would bring salvation to his people.

It would require faith in action on her part. It would require risk on her part. People were going to die if she didn't act.

Listen, we are just like Queen Esther today. Queen Esther made a decision to lay her life on the line to save her people.

What are you willing to die for?

"All to Jesus I surrender." "I surrender all."

Are you willing to give everything up for Jesus? Really?

Listen, we send missionaries into the heart of darkness to bring the gospel to a lost and dying world. They leave home and family for long periods of time. They often give up a higher standard of living to live and work in jungles, deserts, and primitive villages in

remote areas of the world. Some go to modern cities and college campuses, and some go to swamps and islands, isolated from modern conveniences. But they all go putting their faith in action because they realize that if they didn't go – people would die without salvation.

Our missionaries lay it all on the line and sometimes they die on the mission field. Though murder, disease and accident are real hazards, they go anyway.

What exactly are you doing for the cause of Christ today?

Just how big of a thing is it to ask you to give up some of your time to serve the Lord?

- Every one of you who are Christians should be serving the lord in some way.
- All of you should be giving of your time and resources to Kingdom Work.
- All of you should be an active part of a local church.
- All should be regular worshippers – not occasional visitors.

God's tired of our sad excuses as to why we can't work for Him.

If you died right now – do you think God would be pleased with your performance?

Do you think he's going to give you a crown of glory just because you showed up and occupied a pew on Sunday morning?

You have a choice – a choice to pursue God. To pursue a prayer life that is a result of walking with God and praying God-sized prayers.

A choice to make your life count for something that really matters.

Will you do it?

Today, some of you have another important choice to make. Israel was saved and 500 years later a Savior was born. Jesus Christ is the savior of the world, but he saves only those who will come to him in faith.

Being a good person won't save you.

Simply believing in God won't save you.

Just being part of a church won't save you.

I tell people that the church exists to "point people to Jesus Christ..."

God wants a relationship with you, so he allowed his only Son, Jesus to come and pay for your sins so you can be connected to him.

You have a choice to come to him and put your trust and faith in his sacrificial death for you and be forgiven of your sins.