

Esther – Sermon 3¹
“It’s God’s moment, not yours”
Chapters 5-7

Serve Week

We have slots for 90% of the adults that attend here on Sunday AM. That would be truly incredible. It is this coming Thursday through Saturday. I hope we find ourselves back here Sunday AM having poured ourselves out for our community. I want to be that church. We are going to talk today about how God offers you the chance to get in on his work. I hope you understand that’s what this is. God doesn’t need you, but he offers you a chance. I think serve week is a great chance. To begin to get in. Time slots are 2-3 hours each.

INTRODUCTION

Tuesday marks 500 years to the Day when a German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg castle. While that was arguably his most memorable act, his most memorable words came a few years later when he was on trial for instigating a civil rebellion against the holy catholic church. He’s standing there in the courtroom. The entire German royalty and holy roman empire elites are there. They’ve laid out copies of his writing in front of him. He knows what they want. They want him to recant. Because for 4 years this revolution has been spinning out of control and they want the guy that started it all to go back on all this. If they can break Luther, the whole thing loses steam.

See its one thing to nail a paper to a door in the night. It’s another to stand trial in a hostile court. And with everyone watching, knowing that if he doesn’t recant he’s doomed to prison or worse, Luther says that unless you can show me from scripture where I’m wrong in any of my writings, I will not recant. And the famous phrase some accounts say he said next: **Here I Stand, I can do no other.**

This was Martin’s moment. Give in to the threats to spare his own life...Or Trust God and stand for scripture, not the corrupt church empire, being his final authority. He saw the moment. And his conviction before God was worth more to him than his life. So he stood firm...And was condemned a criminal by those in power. And the protestant reformation began to snowball. 500 years ago & we are still profoundly shaped by how God used a feisty German monk’s step of faith.

But here’s the thing. Martin’s moment wasn’t really *his* moment. Luther’s influence was also a huge product of his day. He didn’t control the invention of the printing press only 80 years earlier, by a fellow German, which is considered the most important invention in human history. At one point in his life Martin’s writings accounted for 25% of all printed material in the HRE. Martin didn’t make the Popes in his lifetime so corrupt that they were losing favor with many already. Martin didn’t create the thunderstorm that almost killed him where during it he swore to God that if he lived he’d stop being a lawyer and become a monk. In other words, when you zoom

¹ Sermon 2 in this series was preached by Rashard Barnes on 10.15.2017

out just a bit from his moment there on trial, you see Martin was not the cause of the protestant reformation, he was a player in a drama written and narrated by God himself.

You ever had a moment like Luther had? Where you put it all on the line not sure what was going to happen? But then you look back and see how God had been arranging those circumstances to set that moment up? When I went to China on a short term missions trip – I was battling a slow rehab from reconstructive knee surgery. Plenty of excuses. But I sensed...this may be something special that God *might* have planned for me to get in on. Friends & mentors encouraged me to do it, parents didn't want me to. Tough call and I'm an anxious person so I stalled the decision but in the end decided this might be an on ramp to something God is doing and I want to take the leap. And I did. And I got to see 35 people come to faith on that trip. And I look back now and realize God was organizing all their lives to get to that same moment, from the other side of the world. My 'yes' was just me jumping into the great things God was already doing. I was stressing like the rest of my life hung in the balance, my future was in my hands, but looking back I can see how little control I really had in the situation.

Isn't this true for your life? Those big moments you stressed and agonized over...when you look back on them you realize a whole confluence of events & circumstances were all coming together to get you right there right then. You couldn't have possibly organized everything to get just so. Today I'm going to show you the great freedom and empowerment you get if in here in the present, instead of looking back on it, you

decide that God is the one behind your moments. Big moments yes but also everyday moments.

Today we are going to see Esther's big moment. And we are going to see God was so clearly working the circumstances around Esther. Esther's moment was really God's moment, but she got in on it.

Big Idea: Your moment is really God's moment, but you can get in on it.

Let's jump into the story. Today we cover chapters 5 – 7. Which is gonna be a lot. So I'm going to walk through the story highlighting a few spots as we go. Then show you the freedom & power available to us in it.

[1] On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. Esther 5.1

Ok quick recap:

We opened our series in Esther with the idea that God is either going to work through you or around you. Either way, he is going to work. We talked about how the author of Esther intentionally leaves God's name out of the book as a way to reinforce how God is maneuvering the people and circumstances in Esther's story to bring about his purposes. Remember the story? King Xerxes is king of Persia. He thinks and acts like he is god. Our author is drawing that out to show

us over this week and next how hilarious it is that this man would think he can actually control his world. There are our two heroes: Esther and Mordecai. Esther is a Hebrew woman living in a Persian kingdom because her Hebrew cousin Mordecai adopted her and kept her there. Mordecai thinks this Hebrew identity would be a risk to her so he tells her to keep it a secret. She is young and beautiful and King Xerxes selects her, out of all the women in the kingdom, to be his new queen. The queen of Persia, unbeknownst to anyone except Esther and Mordecai, is a Jew. And that's big today.

Chapter 3 introduced Haman, this wicked guy who set his sights on killing Mordecai after Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. Haman was, like his boss Xerxes, a glory hog. Refusing to bow down was the first in a series of courageous steps of faith these two heroes take to deliver God's people. We'll see more of that today. Haman sets a plot in motion to have all the Jews killed. Mordecai learns about it and gets word to Esther.

And then Esther realizes she is in a moment. Mordecai helps her see that all these things were set in motion so that right here and right now when Israel seemed doomed...God MIGHT have placed HER as the deliverer of God's people. She's the queen. She's one of the few people with the ear of the king who may be able to sway him from wiping out her people. BUT, the custom is if you approach the king he MIGHT listen or he MIGHT kill you for such an offense as entering his court without an invitation. She can't be certain which way it will go. Neither can you or I. MIGHT is as good as it ever gets so that we remain submitted to God and don't try to sit in his seat.

Esther **might** be the deliverer God has put in place. And Pastor Rashard left off on a cliff hanger where Esther says "Ok, I'm gonna go talk to the king...If I perish, I perish."

Now she's in. She's in the inner court. She *might* perish right here where she stands. Watch what happens:

[2] And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Esther 5.2

The key there of course is "she won favor." Could have gone either way. His response wasn't in her control, but she knew he **might** look favorably on her as he had in the past. **Might**. That's all she was working with.

The king then asks her what she wants & Esther plays it cool and says she wants the king and Haman to come to a special dinner held in their honor. This is schmoozing 101. She's no trophy wife. She's a smart woman using her knowledge & position now to make the best play she can make to deliver God's people. Such a good example for us. Wisdom, intellect, awareness of the situation all employed to seek the glory of God & good of God's people. Ok so they come to dinner and at dinner the king asks her what she wants...and she invites them to another dinner the next day! The king is elated. Remember this is the guy who threw 187 day party in honor of himself. So he's got no problem with two days in a row.

When dinner is over Haman is on cloud nine. His head is so big it barely fits out the door...

[9] And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Esther 5:9

Mordecai...because of his identity as one of God's people...refuses to bow to Haman. He stands up to him. Literally. And he knows he *MIGHT* die for this. *MIGHT*. But here he stands, he can do no other. Well Haman can't handle it.

[13] Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

This is what pride does. You can never get enough of it. It blinds you to everything else & you become consumed with...YOU. Your Glory. The WHOLE world is bowing to haman, he is the only guy invited to a second feast with the king and queen, and he says its all worth NOTHING because of the one thing that isn't going his way. Ever had pride blind you like that? You block out everything, you are never happy & never satisfied because every little thing isn't going your way? That's the difference between Haman & Mordecai. Haman is proud, Mordecai has become humble. Pride blinds you to what is happening around you, humility opens your eyes to what God might be doing around you. Pride lifts you up only to let you fall, humility lowers you so that in Christ you may be lifted up. The gospel says Jesus got down off his throne, came down to earth, all the way down to die a criminals death on a cross.

Why? So that you and I who were humbled & brought low by our sin could be lifted up out of the grave we deserve!

One of our college residents led a guy to Christ this week and he said "God pulled that dude right out of the grave before my eyes." And I thought...that's exactly what happens in salvation. Why do I say all that? Because the greatest thing standing in the way of God using this message or any other is your pride. You cannot serve God and yourself.

Back in: Haman goes home, puts in an order for a 75ft high gallows to be built in front of his house so he can hang mordecai on it in the morning. Gonna be a spectacle. Then walks back to palace to get the kings permission to do exactly that.

Then comes chapter 6. Scene shift...haman is en route to the palace. AT THE SAME TIME

[1] On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. Esther 6:1

Even after a feast where his belly is full and he's had beverage...he can't sleep. Stays awake. Which means Haman is gonna get to talk to him when he gets there. Then the KING *happens* (remember week 1) to need help sleeping so he asks for a bedtime story from the book of memorable deeds. And, like we said week 1 the historian *happens* to read:

[2] And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded

the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Esther 6.2

This is the thing that went down at the end of chapter 2. And the king remembers how Mordecai saved his life! And says..

[3] And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." Esther 6.3

And this is where the drama is so good you just gotta listen as I read:

[4] And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. [5] And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." [6] So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" [7] And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, [8] let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. [9] And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king

delights to honor.'" [10] Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned." [11] So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." Esther 6.4-11

The bible is awesome. Haman is so upset by trotting his enemy through the streets that it says he went home afterwards "mourning."

Now comes the climax of the story. Chapter 7. Haman goes in to the day 2 feast. This is the moment Esther has been preparing for. The king asks again...Esther you've done all of this wining and dining for us...what can I do for you? Anything, you name it. And she leaps. She sees what MIGHT be the moment: Her palms are sweaty, knees weak, arms are heavy. She's nervous but on the surface she looks calm & ready...to drop bombs...Ha! Here's what she says:

[3] Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. [4] For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated." Esther 7.3-4a

Haman had been plotting to annihilate the Jews. And Esther uses her position of influence to try and save God's people. And she has no idea what this king will do but he *might* just

spare them from annihilation. BTW when you read OT and you see this...an alarm bell should go off.

Esther is standing before the king trying to prevent what would be the legal annihilation of all her people. Jesus didn't stand in a palace before a king he hung on a cross before a king. And he didn't just ask that innocent people be spared...he said father FORGIVE THEM for they know not what they do. He died for you and I, rebels who deserved death and said God I'll take their punishment! Esther is one of the greatest, courageous heroes of the bible. And Jesus said her main purpose was to help you and I understand HIM better.

Well the story finishes pretty quickly. The king flips out and says who did this? Esther says...that wicked Haman. Haman freaks out. The king is so angry at this betrayal by his #2 that he steps outside to cool off. He comes back in the room to find Haman "falling on the couch" where Esther was sitting. He was most likely groveling for his life & the king thought Haman was assaulting her. King LOOSES IT." Don't touch my woman. He has Haman taken away and is trying to figure out a punishment when one of his interns says "you know, Haman had that gallows built last night." And in a beautiful stroke of irony the King hangs Haman on the very gallows Haman prepared for Mordecai.

Esther and Mordecai both risk their lives for the sake of Honoring God and carrying out his purposes. Haman seeks to honor himself. Esther & Mordecai live, Haman dies. Their moment was really God's moment. I want to show you why its great news that your moment is God's moment and then how to see what God might be doing in your moment.

When you begin to see your moments as God's moments:

1. You become empowered to be a part of something so much bigger than you

How many of you have seen Finding Nemo? That's a film. Nemo's dad Marlin & Dori are trying to swim across the Pacific ocean to find Nemo. But that's going to take a lifetime. Then they learn about the EAC [East Australian Current]. This current, when inside of it, will shoot them through the ocean waaaay faster and farther without them really having to swim at all.

See our lives are so often marked by swimming really hard and going virtually nowhere in the grand scheme of things. And we get by, some more successful than others, but the whole time we have moments where we think...Does any of this matter? What am I doing with my life? A few more deals, a few more dollars...but what am I really doing!? I'm trying to achieve something but I don't really know where I'm going and even if I get really wealthy or popular...what will that give me? The answer is nothing. Just wandering in the ocean striving towards a destination you'll never reach.

When you decide to finally see your moments as God's moments, you are going to get caught up in God's current. You will find yourself serving people & being an agent of change in their story will be sooo much better than just worrying about building your kingdom. I have a friend who was an exec at SAS who went on a short term trip to South Asia to help with tsunami relief. He came back, told his family he was quitting his job and they with their two teenagers

moved there to plant churches and help people. I'm not saying that will be you, but I'm saying his life gained a purpose HE didn't have before. Most of you will not quit your jobs. Even better you will start to see your job as about more than career advancement but instead as gospel advancement. Think about that. God CAN use someone else. And he will if you refuse him. But he's put you in a position to get in on what he is doing. Maybe he has put you here, like esther, to deliver people from death and bring them to life in Christ! Maybe you are in education and you can use your influence to speak the gospel to fellow educators and to model the love of Christ in how you care for your students. Maybe you are in an office, a company, a field with virtually NO Christians...that's not a negative. It's an opportunity! Be Esther and hold everything with an open hand making God's glory your goal. Don't be dumb. Be wise, clever, humble, but also bold. God's mission will take you on a ride where you will see lives changed and your life will be filled in a unique and powerful way.

2. You become free from the burden of you. Listen, you as the center of your world...its exhausting...for you. You are an exhaustingly selfish person. Sorry. Bottom line is...you were never meant to be the center of your universe! "I'm looking out for number one!" Well that's great as long as number one isn't YOU! When Esther was first confronted about her opportunity to help Israel, she was worried about her personal survival. And that fear paralyzed her. And I see Christians all the time who sit frozen while opportunities pass them by and its usually self-centeredness expressing itself in a few ways:

1. Some let moments pass by because they are afraid it's the wrong opportunity for them. that if they step out, this will be the wrong thing for them and the thing God actually has for them is coming just around the corner. That's not how God works. Take a summer for a college student: You could give it to a summer missions trip...but maybe God wants you to stay here instead. NO...God wants you to do whatever gives him the most glory. This isn't your moment. It's his moment. But you can get in on it. What will allow you to get in on what he's doing?

2. Some let moments pass by because they don't think they are capable. Eh...I'm not going to start that ministry or tutor kids or tell my co-worker I'm a Christian because I just cant. I'll mess it up. ITS NOT ABOUT YOU!!! The whole bible is God using clumsy imperfect people for his glory. In fact, the people I get most worried about in ministry are the ones who feel like they are fully competent and able to do it. It's not your moment to mess up. It's God's moment. He's got it. You just have to trust him enough to step into it and if you perish you perish.

I have a friend, Sharon Miller, just wrote a new book called "free of me" that hit on some of this and in her introduction she talked about the freedom that comes with the idea "it's not about you."

"The friend who rejected you, the parent who hurt you, the boss who insulted you, the neighbor who was rude to you – *it's not about you*. Their brokenness, their cold, piercing words; none of that was about you, but them. When your

house isn't as big as you'd like it to be, or your ministry as successful, or your name isn't as well known, thank goodness it isn't about you. Your marriage, your calling, your life here on earth, none of it is about you. It's all about God, from the first to the last, and that is some of the best news on earth."²

It's not your moment. It's God's moment. And that is freeing! And he invites you into what he is doing! Before I talk about steps to take let me tell you the deepest roots of this freedom: It's that you are free in Christ. See Christ has set you free from the burden of building yourself up. Of living for yourself. The gospel says you can stop trying to justify yourself, build a kingdom for yourself, save yourself. That can all stop. God wants you. Not because of your resume or moral track record. He loves you. And he says you can have his love, his permanent soul fulfilling eternity setting love...and you don't have to earn it. Just receive it. Repent of making your life about you and give your life to him. There is freedom there you will never find the bottom of.

how to get in on God's moment

Once you finally get to that point where you are ready to, like Esther, see the moments of your life as God's moment...how do you do it? Three questions you need to ask:

1. What would give God glory in this moment?
Remember Mordecai's comment to Esther? "Who knows if you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther was worried about her own survival until this moment where she looked up from herself and looked around at what God was doing. And she changed the question. Instead of asking what was best for HER she began to ask what would glorify God?

This is the question that is going to keep you fighting for your marriage. This is the question that is going to cause you to go public with your faith among your co-workers and on classmates. When you realize you are in God's moment, not your moment...then the spotlight shifts off of you and you can operate in the freedom of "what will give God glory?" If you are like "I'm not really sure. Well, good news is God has given you a few things to help you. #1 is his word. Read it. #2 is his Holy Spirit – Some people make giant life decisions and never bother to consult God. #3 is his church. Ask the believers you trust in your community group, ask your elders. I had a woman sit in my office a few years back and confidently tell me God was calling her to leave her husband because she didn't love him anymore. I said...what does his word say? No. What do your community group members say? No. Well I'm with them.

2. What is the worst that could happen?
You don't really need to ask this one. SOME of you do. And I'm giving you permission to game this thing out so you can see how silly you are. Because you are worst case scenario people like me. If this isn't you...God bless you, you can skip this one.

² Miller, Sharon *Free of Me* (Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI 2017) 14.

Esther says "If I perish I perish." For Esther, it was death. Let's start there. Maybe you are wondering if you should go be a missionary in a closed country. Maybe. I believe God will send some of you there. And if he does...you could be killed for it. Hebrews 11.37 – some were sawn in two. No book deals, no big ministries or anything. They went for the Lord and they died. And that's ok because it wasn't their moment. It was God's moment! They didn't miss out. They lived a more fulfilling life than so many who spend their lives trying to maximize pleasure, numb pain and delay death. Do you understand that's the worst case scenario? That you sacrifice eternity for 70 years of pleasure and comfort here? Worst case.

So if you die, and you are in Christ, when you die you wake up in the presence of Christ. So your worst case is meeting Jesus a little sooner than you would have anyways.

Most of you face less scary worst cases though right? Remember what I told you a few weeks ago about how I game this out? For me: it's that I end up homeless under a bridge with my family. And what did I tell you? Better ANY DAY to be homeless under a bridge with God than successful without him. Speak your fears. They are sillier than you think. Write them down. Confess them to God and then, like Esther, realize God's mission isn't about you or your comfort it's about God and his holiness. STEP IN and watch him change the world through you!

3. What step **MIGHT** God be calling me to take?

It's ok to be uncertain. Esther didn't know what would happen and it wasn't like God had written it on a wall what she was supposed to do. She looked at her situation, listened to a trusted advisor, and took a leap! In the new testament when the apostles are sending out Paul & Barnabas they say "it seemed good to us to choose some men to send with you guys." Seemed. That's the best read they really get on the Holy Spirit. God isn't after some decoder ring level of understanding of what he's doing. He just wants you to take a step into his mission. He will use you for his glory when that is your goal.

It won't be easy. Some of you need to give your lives to Christ today. And it won't be easy. In fact we are promised suffering. But it will be worth it. You can finally be free of...you. And God will use you far beyond what you ever imagined when you step into his mission and his purposes for your life.