

This morning we will be back in the book of Esther if you want to find it in your bibles, we will be chapters 3 and 4. But before I do I would like to share a story with you.

So, I was 85 pounds heading into 7th grade. I was small and easy to ignore. In fact, my mom put extra books in my bag so I wouldn't blow away. By the time I got to the 8th grade I had gotten a little taller, was 115 pounds, I got some muscles on me, braids, and my voice dropped an octave. And it was during that time I got invited to my first junior high house party. It was first and my last, but it changed everything for me.

This party was vital because it was going to seal my legend at JT Hutchinson Junior High. Now I just finished up my first season of my legendary wrestling career. And an invite to this party would mean I made it. Now, mind you. The only house party that I have attend was in the 5th grade, and we listened to N-SYNC, which left me confused. But anyway, that memory made me nervous. Despite that experience, I went this party anyway.

So, my friend and I who was by the way this big 6'3 dude that looked like Terry Crews in the 8th grade came along with me. Now let me tell you, this party was lit! People were dancing, there were raps battles, there were chicken wings, and the Kool-aid was on point.

But one thing in the back of my mind I needed to do before I left was that I needed to dance with a girl. The thought process was if all the fellas see me dancing with a girl they will know that I am "the Man". So all I needed was an opportunity. So the pressure was on, but the only problem I was short and all the girls were taller than me. My friend was on the dance doing his thing. But I had a challenged ahead of me. So all night I stood on the wall just watching and thinking about how I was going accomplished this difficult task. Then finally, there was this girl that was my height that I noticed across the room. **But I had to get all the courage an 8th-grade boy could to walk over to her, ask her dance and then to get on the dance floor.** For an 8th grade boy, this is a do-or-die moment. And I did, and the rest was history.

This story and is funny, right? But here is the sticking point, this small moment of courage prepared me a bigger moment in my life to which we are going to hear about later. But what we are going to see in the book of Esther in these chapters is that she is confronted with a choice, that is going to be life or death for her and the Jews. It was going to take some courageous faith in her which is the topic of today's sermon.

So here is my hope for today is that you would see the grace of God and your life that move you to action. Now for everyone in the room God is calling us to go something for his glory and his fame. For some of you that are exciting and others, you struggle with the idea of God using you at all. Not because you don't want him to use you but rather the opposite you are afraid that he might ask you to get off the sidelines and into the game. So as a result, we sit and let moments of opportunity to demonstrate our faith pass us by.

Now Mercy church I need you to hear this, God is deeply in love with you so with that I need you to listen to this sermon from a perspective of grace.

Nonetheless, here is the sticking point I want to get across in this sermon **courageous faith requires trust in God and action in you.**

So as we learned last week, the book of Esther is one of the most dynamic stories in the scriptures. It stands out for two reasons, one is that it does not mention the name God but just because he seems silent it doesn't mean he is not working and two we see God use imperfect people to carry out his plan.

So today we are going to see Esther and Mordecai go through a transformation. We are going to see God work in them and the result is the courageous act of faith.

**But we before we dive in head deep, let's just do some recap:**

- Last week, Pastor Spence gave us an introduction to the book, and we were introduced to three characters, Esther, Xerxes, and Mordecai.
- King Xerxes is the ruler of the Persian Empire. And throws a Party with the express purpose of showing off the extent of his riches and wealth. 180 DAYS!
- At the end of this time, He sends for his wife to show off her beauty for all to see. She refuses to come, and Xerxes has her banished from the Kingdom.
- So the King must have a queen in that day, so the King performs the first every Bachelor contest. He had women who had been at the spa for six months come to him to see if they would be fit for his Queen.
- The girl that rose to the top was Esther. The Bible describes her as having a beautiful figure and lovely to look at. How we say that from the parts I am from is homegirl was "fine."
- As we learned, Esther was a Jew who was adopted by her cousin Mordecai; he was the one who told to conceal her identity as a Jew so that she can win the contest.
- And she won the contest. She became the Queen of the known world.
- Chapters two ends with Mordecai saving the King by telling Esther that the kings Eunuchs were going to destroy him. Esther told the King, and it was recorded in the book

**Then we arrive in here in Chapter 3. Let's read**

**Esther 3:1-6** — After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" 4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he

would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.<sup>5</sup> And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. <sup>6</sup> But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

### **Here we meet Haman.**

Haman is the close official of the King. As we just read the King commanded everyone to bow down to Haman, but Mordecai did not.

Let stop here. In these precious chapters, we see Mordecai as this passive cowardly guy. He did not go back to Jerusalem like the rest of the Jews which was instructed in Isaiah for the Jews to return to Jerusalem after being in exile but he remained in Susa. But we see here that Mordecai is starting to make courageous acts of faith which in this chapter is not bowing down to Haman. This infuriates Haman. He plots to not only wipe out Mordecai but the entire Jewish race as well.

To the human eye, this just seems like a little power struggle for Haman, but it's much deeper than that. As Pastor Spence has said, we need to read between the lines in this book. The writer wanted us to pay attention to this detail. You see from the very beginning of Israel's history there was beef with the Amalekites and the Jews, specifically the Benjaminites. You see our boy Haman is a descendant of Agag, King of the Amalekites. And Mordecai is a Jew, a Benjaminite. Their families from the beginning of Israel's history has had beef. In fact, the Israelites were supposed to destroy the Amalekites, but they are still around.

The connection point here is that there is long-standing tension between the two. Tension like the Cowboys and Redskins, Duke and Carolina.

As a result, when Mordecai refused to bow, that brought up old feelings in Haman, and his payback was to destroy the Jews. Thus, this puts more emphasis on the faith that Mordecai had to demonstrated here. This was more than a casual feud. This was deep.

But we have to keep moving; we aren't going to read the rest of the chapter there. But for the sake of time but the rest of the chapter ends with Haman telling the king that he will pay his own money for the Jews to be destroyed and the king blessed it by extending his signet ring, this important later in the story. The result was the King sent out a decree that in about 11 months the Jews are to be annihilated.

### **Let move on to Chapter 4, let's read:**

**Esther 4:1-3** — When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. <sup>2</sup> He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter

the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. 3 And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Mordecai learned what happens and tore his clothes and cried out to God. And the Jews followed suit. This is a critical moment in Mordecai life. As we have learned, he was not the modeled Jew. In fact, when he started to act like a Jew, he managed to get them all punished. Can you imagine that you do good, but bad stuff happens?

But the thing to point out here was Mordecai went from a spectator to participant. **Mordecai knew that it was risky and he got off the wall and got out on the dance floor and busted a move.** This my friends is courageous faith. He took his faith public and considered the cost. **So what does this mean for you?** It means that there is time for you???(pause) **Don't let your past disobedience keep you from being obedient and active now.**

You can move from passive to active. This passage is in the context of injustice, but I want to stop to push some of us. Some of you have been around for a while, and you haven't gotten involved. That might be your step of faith right now. Some of you are putting entertainment and the weekend over taking next steps of courageous faith. For some of you is to start a ministry. Get involved in the community. Others of you it leaves a relationship, press harder into one, break free of a habit or sin pattern. These are just a few examples but what is for you?

When asked about am I excited about being in Charlotte I have mixed emotions. Although I love this church and I am starting to love this city I am still mourning a bit. You see moving to Charlotte has been hard me. One thing it that I left a church that I helped get a church off the ground back in Texas. This church was a fast-growing church, and the areas that I oversaw were going well. But that's not the only reason why I mourn leaving back in Texas I left back lots of relationships including my family. It was hard for me to leave them because we are close and there are some circumstances that were just hard. I left coming to Charlotte from the hospital visiting my dad in hospital. The hospital visits are like grocery store visits for my family. He has had three heart attacks; he is on dialysis and 15 medications at the age of 55. That was hard to leave. Not only that my aunt died who was number seven of my dad sibling to die, so my family was grieving. That was hard to leave. My mother found out that she has MS and it has already taken a toll on her other siblings, that was hard for me. My sister wrestles with depression, and often I am one of the only persons to talk her through it, that was hard for me. My brother who has a felony he can't leave the state easily, that was hard for me to leave.

You see I wanted to stay in Lubbock because of my family but also because my work situation was great. I helped build this church and we finally got a financial and relational position to where things were great. But then God was moving on my heart to leave. But here is the kicker, before I join in on the work of this church, God had placed in me a vision to engaged in a multiethnic work.

So I had a decision to make — stay in the comforts of my hometown or move to Charlotte to a city that has a decorated racial past. It was difficult, and it's hard now. Every day I questioned if we made the right decision but every day I am praying that the Lord leads by faith. This is currently my courageous acts of faith. So I am going to ask again. **What move is God asking you to make? What is your dance floor?**

**Let's keep reading:**

**Esther 4:4-8** — 4 When Esther's young women 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 this was and why it was. 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 and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people.

So we earlier, that all the Jews are crying and mourning because they are about to get killed and Esther is chilling in the palace, not knowing what is going? She's grieved that Mordecai was grieving but not enough to get up and move. She was just living her life in comfort and convenience.

Like Esther, I am concerned that many of you a living like a life of comfort and convenience and you are convincing yourself you are not because you do a random act of Christians duties. Now I don't want to devalue those acts of faith, but God is calling all of us to take courageous steps of faith. Most of us take attainable steps one like Esther with just sending clothes but staying back. Look at verse 4.

Mordecai refused the clothes from Esther sent them back with Hathach the eunuch. And then Esther sent him right back to see what was going on. Then Mordecai sent the eunuch back with the decree from Haman that all the Jews are going to be destroyed. And a message from Mordecai to pleading Esther to go to the King on behalf of the Jews to plead for a favor. But have to keep moving, let see what Esther did next. Let's read verses 10-11.

10Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, 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—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.

So then Esther responded back to Mordecai that if she went to King, she would die. **But check this, Esther's crisis became an opportunity for her.** For many of us, we think that God is going to grow us when it is most convenient for us. But God is usually going to grow us the best in the most difficult of time. This what he is doing in Esther.

What we see here is that Esther is beginning to move from being a beauty queen to become a Jewish saint, from being an empty-headed sex symbol to being a passionate intercessor, from the busy-indolent life in the palace to the high-risk venture of speaking for and identifying with God's people.

And now Esther has a choice to make. Will she speak for a group of people who were not able to stand up for themselves? Let's read verse 12-17

**Esther 4:12-17** — 12 And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. 13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Mordecai pleaded with her one more time. You are placed here for such a time as this! He said Esther; you can't just sit here. God's people are going to get destroyed but so are you. You cannot keep silent. But he said something powerful; he said **God is going to accomplish his will with you or without you! But you are here for such a time as this!** You are placed in this spot for such a moment as this! I don't know how God is going to work, but he is going to work!

You see many are us in this room are currently in place of Esther we are sitting in a place of privilege and God is calling us to take some radical steps of faith, courageous steps of faith.

You see there are all kinds privilege like financial, racial, social, and gender. There are people in each of those spaces that are being mistreated, getting killed, in poverty, get trafficked and what are we doing?

While many of us think we are not harming anything by staying in our lane but you are mistaken. As we learn, other people are affected by our actions, but you are too. **When you decide to remain passive you lose.** Why? Because you are living self-willed life over a god-directed life. When we live for ourselves, we put ourselves in place of God and therefore we don't see a need for him. We crowd out his voice and obedience is a distant memory. And that's killing you inside because you're living a life without purpose. So let's see Esther's response, let's read.

**Esther 4:15-17** — 15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then 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.

Verse 16 is one of the most powerful statements in the bible. “If I perish, I perish.” We need to understand here that this type of faith doesn’t just happen. It takes God giving us an opportunity to trust him and then for us to act.

Esther and Mordecai were not the model Jews. This is four years into Esther being queen till she started to do something. Esther was disobedient in some many ways, **but she encountered something that could not keep her passive, and that is the grace of God.** When she fasted and prayed, she met with the God of the bible. The God of the bible that doesn't condemn of our past mistakes, the God of the bible that gives us grace undeserving, the God of the bible that forgives us when we don't deserve it, the God of the bible that sent himself to die for his people.

Esther was able to say that if I perish because God sent his Son down and perished for us. He came down from heaven, took upon on sins. But guest what, unlike Esther Jesus did not fear death. He perished for three days, but he rose from the grave. Why? So that he can be in a relationship with you and I. Mercy Church, this is good news!

Here is the dilemma in Esther. We look at Esther, and we all want to model what she did. But here is the better news for you and me, Jesus is the better Esther.

You see we have a problem deeper than the judgment of Haman who wrongly judged Israel. We have a problem with the judgment of God who rightly judges us. And that is why Christ came.

Because we refused to bow down to God and worship him, adore, obey and honor him. We rebelled, and according to the scriptures, our rebellion to God leads to a death sentence. As we look at Israel condition, they also needed someone from the throne to rescue them, and Esther did that. Esther was able to do so because she was Persian royalty, but she was also a Jew. She was a mediator. Just like the Jews, we need someone that was like us but different from us to rescue us. This is Jesus who was God but yet man. He was without sin but became sin for us to that we can become the righteousness of God.

So we can take steps of faith because Jesus took all the necessary steps for us. We can make progress into engaging the hardest thing of faith because Jesus engaged the hardest thing for us by dying on the cross and raising from the dead. He got on the dance floor and danced for you us and gave us credit. Like Esther, he came down from his throne so that we can get off ours and enter into hard space and be courageous.

So Mercy Church there is hope, and there is time! Israel was the mistreated, the outcast of society. Like the Jews in their day, we have people in our city being traffic, but we have people in our church that has the means to meet others need. You are here for such a time as this and a

lot this will feel like death, but you will also start experiencing life. Don't let your past disobedience prevent you from being obedient now.

So what I want to do is to narrow on three actions points from the text that will help take courageous steps of faith.

**First point: Courageous faith causes you to pray expectantly.**

When Esther was confronted with her faith, she fasted and prayed. Let's look back at the text in verse 15. You see **Prayer is action.**

**Do you have dangerous prayer life?** Here is what I mean by that— a prayer life that causes you to do nothing but tremble and pray expectantly? If not, what are your prayers like? A dangerous prayer is a prayer a full understanding of the power of God, your sin, and the sin around you that causes you surrender and beg God to move in you. **If you are praying a prayer that you can do on your own, then that isn't a dangerous prayer.** A dangerous prayer causes dependence. Mercy I am going to ask you again, do you have a dangerous prayer life? What is God asking you to do in prayer?

**Second point: Courageous faith moves us to seek out God's plan.**

Esther one of the most powerful, riches, and influential figures of her time. She was placed in the kingdom at this particular moment in history to be used by God. But as Mordecai stated, if she didn't move, God was going to use someone else. But we see that God was calling Esther, she was the one. As we have noticed in this book, the name of God is not mention but that doesn't mean he isn't moving. In fact, how God works is that a lot of times he is asking her to be voice, his hands, his feet. We are the visible realities of what is unseen.

So what does this mean for you? Lawyer, doctor, construction worker, stay at home mom. **What is the one thing that only you can do to move the ball forward in God's kingdom?** Is there someone who doesn't know Jesus whom you sense the Lord is leading you to befriend? What are some practical steps you can take to move toward him or her? That might be sharing the Gospel with your neighbor, or engaging in an injustice you have noticed. It might be loving your kids even when you don't want to.

This is what courageous faith does; it allows to ask questions to consider your role in God's plan.

**Third Point: Courageous faith leads to bold actions.**

We see the transformation of Esther. She changed from fear to abandonment and faith, from hesitation to confidence and determination, from concern for her safety to concern for her people's survival. She has reached her hour of the decision and has not been found waiting. Esther sees her moment on the dance floor, and she takes it.



So what is God asking you to do? Who is asking you to love? What injustices is he asking to engage in? **What is the unpopular choice God is leading you to make that you are ignoring?** For Esther, the Jews were going to get destroyed, for us the people are Charlotte needs the hope of the Gospel. Has a chosen you to do something about it! This is grace, my friends! Can you believe God would allow you to trust him even though you have messed up?

Mercy I want to end here, courageous faith requires trust in God and action in you. With all this in mind lets us pray.