

Pastor Paul Bawden
Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, November 23, 2008
Life-Changing Lessons From Biblical Personalities
"Am I A Risk Taker With God?" – Esther
Esther 4:1-5:3

The **time** is around 474 B.C. (Between Ezra 6 & 7 in the Old Testament)

The **country** is the Persian Empire.

The **king** is Xerxes I (Ahasuerus is the Hebrew form) – Reigned from 486-465 B.C.

The **city** is Susa, the capitol of the Persian Empire.

The **place** is the king's palace in Susa.

The **characters** involved are

Mordecai – A Jew who evidently was involved in judicial matters for the king, since he was always at the king's gate, a place where commercial and judicial matters were transacted.

Esther – her Persian name means "star." Her Hebrew was Hadassah, meaning "myrtle." She was a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She was a beautiful young lady.

Haman – The king promoted him to Prime Minister of the Persian Empire with authority over all the provinces.

The Jewish people – They had been exiled by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. when he attacked and ransacked Jerusalem. Cyrus defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. In 536 B.C. Cyrus made a decree that the Jewish people could return to their homeland. Ezra gives us information about that return. Of course many Jews did not return to Jerusalem and to their homeland. During the time of Xerxes I, then, many Jews were still scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

King Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) of the Persian Empire.

The circumstances – high drama,

Through an amazing turn of events, King Xerxes I was looking for a new queen. He was advised to issue a decree that young ladies who desired to be in the running to be the king's queen beauty contest were to gather at the citadel in Susa where Hegi was in charge of the women. Mordecai who raised Esther, urged her to enter the king's queen beauty contest.

In the process, Esther stood out above the others in this contest. Eventually, after a period of 12 months for beautification, the young ladies would go before the king. When Esther's turn came to go before the king, the king fell in love with her and chose her as his queen. A great banquet was given in celebration of Esther being the queen of Persia. At this time, no one knew that Esther was Jewish, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal her people.

After these events, Haman had been made Prime Minister of Egypt by the king. All the servants of the king bowed to Haman, giving him some kind of divine honor, which honor was also given to Persian kings. Mordecai, on the other hand, would not bow to Haman or give him any kind of homage. As a Jew, Mordecai knew that he could give any divine honor to anyone but God (Deuteronomy 6:13-14).

Haman became furious at Mordecai, and wanted to lay hands on him, but finding out that he was a Jew, Haman wanted to destroy all of Mordecai's people scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

To carry out his evil plan, Haman went to the king and told him that there were a certain people in the land who did not obey the king's laws, so it is not in the interest of the king to let them live. Then Haman asked the king

that if it pleased him let a decree be made, and he would give something like \$15 billion to the king's treasuries. The king gave Haman power to sign the decree with the signet of his ring and told Haman to keep the money for himself. The decree went out by couriers, the postal service, to all the king's provinces that the Jews should be killed and their possession taken as plunder. The king and Haman sat down to drink in the palace while the city of Susa was in confusion.

Esther 4

When Mordecai heard the edict, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, (a sign of mourning) and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly, ending up near the king's gate. As the news spread throughout the Persian Empire, there was fasting, weeping and wailing among the Jewish people, and many lay on sackcloth.

Hearing of what was happening, Esther was in anguish, greatly disturbed. She sent her attendant to Mordecai to find out what was wrong. Mordecai told her servant Hathach what was wrong. He also gave Hathach a copy of the edict sent out by Haman for Esther to read.

But Mordecai also told Esther that she needed to go before the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.

When Esther received back Mordecai's message she told Hathach to tell Mordecai that no one comes to the inner court of the king without being summoned. If one goes before the king, and he does not hold out his golden scepter to that person, the person dies. Then she added, that the king had not summoned her for 30 days. (picture of a royal golden scepter)

Esther's words were related back to Mordecai.

Mordecai responded with these four words (Esther 4:13-14).

"Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and your father's house will perish . . ."

And then the famous words of Mordecai, which are still used today.

"And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" Or also translated.

"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther directed Mordecai to assemble all the Jews in Susa for fasting three days and three nights. She and her maidens would fast as well. Then she would go into the king.

Famous words, again, "If I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16).

The rest is history.

Esther went before the King in her royal robes and stood in the inner court, where the king was sitting on his throne. He held out the golden scepter to her, and she came to him and touched the golden scepter. He asked her what was troubling her, and what was her request. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet that she had prepared for them that day. They came quickly to the banquet, and then the king asked Esther what her request was, and he added he would give her half of the kingdom.

Esther did not make her request at that banquet but invited the king and Haman to another banquet she was preparing for them tomorrow. Haman went home bragging to his wife how only he was invited with the king to a banquet prepared by Esther the queen. He also bragged about his riches. Since he had seen Mordecai in the way home, he was very angry at him, and his wife upon hearing this told Haman to prepare gallows 75 feet tall for his execution.

Something happened that night to the king for he couldn't sleep. So he gave orders for the chronicles of the king to be brought for him to read. Upon reading, he discovered that Mordecai had saved the king's life (cf. Esther 2:21-22).

The king inquired if any honor had been given to Mordecai for saving his life. The answer, nothing had been done.

The next morning Naman was in the king's court early to seek permission to have Mordecai executed, and it turned out that Naman ended up being the one to honor Mordecai, putting on him a royal robe which the king had worn, and having him ride on the horse on which the king had ridden. Haman then led Mordecai on horseback through the city square, proclaiming, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."

Naman went home in mourning, telling his wife what happened and she predicted events were turning against him since Mordecai was honored. While they were still talking, the king's servants came to get Haman for Queen Esther's banquet.

At the second banquet, Esther told the king what her request entailed (Esther 7:3-5). She and her people's lives were at stake to be killed. The king wanted to know who would do this. Esther replied quickly, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman." The king rose from the table in anger and went out into the palace garden. Haman stayed to beg for his life before the queen. When the king returned it appeared that Haman was making advances toward the queen. The king was very upset and it was told him that there were gallows made for Mordecai, and the king told his servants to "Hang him (Haman) on it." (Esther 7:9).

Such a turn of events continued, as Mordecai was made prime minister in the place of Haman, and Esther put Mordecai over the house of Haman. Esther fell at the feet of king Xerxes and wept imploring him to avert the evil scheme of Haman. **The king extended to Esther the golden scepter and she stood before him, and asked that a new edict be written and sent out to all the provinces to revoke the first edict and to give her people the right to defend, kill, and to annihilate those who might attack them, as well as being able to plunder their spoil (Esther 8:7-14).**

This edict that went throughout the Persian Empire by the postal service brought joy and gladness to the Jewish people. There was a holiday of feasting.

Those who turned against the Jews were put down. Mordecai's influence encouraged the Jews to defeat their enemies, and others joined with the Jews because of Mordecai's influence. Those who followed Haman and his ten sons were killed as well (Esther 9).

As a result of this enormous victory for the Jewish people a yearly celebration was established known as Purim, taken from the Pur, an Assyrian word meaning "lot." Haman had cast lots regarding when it would be the best time to carry out his plot against the Jews (Esther 3:7).

Purim is still commemorated today by the Jewish people. It was on what we call Good Friday this year, March 21. I understand that the day before is a day of fasting in accordance with command of Esther (Esther 4:15-16). On the evening attendance is made at the synagogue which the reading of the book of Esther and when the name of Haman is read, people stomp their feet, hiss, and boo, and say "Let his name be blotted out. The name of the wicked shall rot!" while the children use rattles or noise makers. The next day, on Purim, attendance is made at the synagogue again with prayers, a lesson from the law, and the book of Esther is read again. The rest of the festival is given to rejoicing, the exchange of presents, games, etc. While Purim is technically a "minor" festival on the Jewish calendar, it is a major time of fun and celebration. In fact, the rabbis of old taught that even when the Messiah comes and other holidays are abandoned, Jewish people will continue to observe Purim. Three-cornered cookies shaped to resemble Haman's (boo) hat are made and served.

I understand that Purim is an exciting time in the Jewish community.

What do we learn from the book and life of Esther, who was willing to risk her life for her people.

I. Let's consider first something about the theology of the book of Esther.

- 1. As you read the book you will notice that the word, God, is not used in the Book of Esther.**
- 2. In fact, the lead characters like Mordecai and Esther, although Jewish, do not use the word God in their conversations.**
- 3. Yet words like fasting are used in the Book of Esther (Esther 4:16), which it would be assumed that there would also be prayer. In fact when the Jewish people heard the first edict from the king, they fasted, wept, and wailed (Esther 4:3). Evidently, they prayed.**
- 4. Mordecai would not give any divine recognition to Haman, which made Haman furious and set up the great battle between him and Queen Esther (Esther 3:1-5). So Mordecai seemed to have some understanding of what the Law of the Lord said in Deuteronomy 6:13-14, "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you."**
- 5. Even though the name of God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, it is obvious that the providence of God is at work as the details work out for the good of God's people Israel. What is providence? God directing His world to accomplish His purposes for His people for their good and His glory. The king can't sleep at night and wants to read the king's chronicles. There he finds that Mordecai saved his life, and discovers that Mordecai was not honored for that feat. The king has Mordecai honored by Haman who wants to take Mordecai's life (Esther 6). Haman is eventually hanged on the very gallows he prepared for Mordecai.**
- 6. In the providence of God (which also includes God's sovereignty) there are some other areas that we need to consider:**
 - Deuteronomy 7:3 states that the Jews were not to marry Gentiles. Esther became the queen of the king of Persia.**
 - In Leviticus 11:44, and Daniel 1:8, the Jewish people were not to eat that which was unclean, and that which was offered to a pagan god. Did Esther engage in that kind of activity?**
 - Certainly, both Mordecai and Esther as Jews would have some background in the law of Moses, or had that been somewhat ignored since they had been in captivity.**
 - At first in the book of Esther, there seems to be no human pressure on Mordecai to have Esther enter the beauty contest to see if she might become the queen of the king of Persia. Or did he sense as a Jew that there might be a backlash against the Jewish people, and saw how Esther might be the salvation of her people.**
- 7. We must also keep in mind that regardless of some of the theological difficulties here, that God's sovereign providence and grace is at work through the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant made with Abraham around 2000 B.C. In spite of spiritual maturity or lack thereof in the life of Mordecai and Esther, God was using their desire to save His people from extermination in the Persian Empire, saving as well the Messianic line, in order to keep carrying out His program for His people.**
- 8. This does not mean that God's providence justifies sin. Mordecai's actions don't give us license to disobey the Lord and his laws and principles. Shall we sin that grace may abound? Obviously, No (Romans 6:1-3). A wrong never makes a right. Neither does God's providence take away the consequence of breaking God's laws (Romans 6:23). Believers are to confess their sin to the Lord and follow Him (I John 1:9).**
- 9. God in His providence (in the fullness of time – at actually the right moment – Galatians 4:4) provided His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Sin Bearer and Savior through his death, burial and bodily resurrection. Through faith in Him, the believer becomes born into God's forever family.**
- 10. For the believer, the providence of God should be an impetus to live for Him and do His will (Acts 4:29-31). Be assured that the providence of God is at work in our country as we see a breakdown in the economy and the new president-elect putting together his cabinet. Remember, God is still the King forever and ever (Psalm 10:16). His kingdom is everlasting (Psalm 145:13).**

II. Let's consider Esther's heart to save her people from destruction.

- 1. Esther identified with Mordecai when she heard about his putting on sackcloth and ashes, mourning near the king's gate (Esther 4:4).**
- 2. When Esther found out why Mordecai was mourning she listened to his counsel even though there was great risk involved. Those words to her from Mordecai must have caused her to think much about what he said, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).**
- 3. She was willing to fast (3 days and 3 nights) and perhaps pray before taking this risk which could mean the end of her life on planet earth (Esther 4:16 a). There was preparation for the risk she would take.**
- 4. Esther counted the cost of going to see the king without an invitation. "If I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:16).**
- 5. Esther was willing to go against what was the politically (the royally) correct action to take. It was the so-called protocol of the day for the king to summon the queen. To go see the king without being summoned could mean death. Her desire was so great to save her people that she was willing to break the protocol.**
- 6. Esther exercised faith, I believe, faith in the LORD (in spite of some of the other areas where the law of God had been broken), and she went into see the king not knowing how he would respond.**
- 7. Esther was convinced in her heart that God wanted to save His people and she was the one who must step forward to do it.**
- 8. When the king saw his beautiful queen in her royal robes, he showed her favor, I believe his heart melted,(perhaps thinking, "Wow! Here is the queen I love!), and he extended the golden scepter to her and she came and touched it. Then he asked her what was on her mind and told her that he would be glad to give her request even to half of the kingdom.**
- 9. Once she had the king's accepted attention, she didn't tell him her request but invited the king and Haman to a banquet, where she didn't tell the king her request, and it wasn't until the second banquet that she told the king what she wanted. All the time, she was raising curiosity in the king's mind, and of course over the night the king couldn't sleep, and asked for the king's chronicles to read, where he discovered how Mordecai had saved his life, but had not be recognize for it. God's providence at work.**
- 10. Esther's risk taking for God's people resulted in God delivering His people through her request at the direction of the king.**
- 11. Esther's deliverance, her risk taking, is remembered to this day through the Feast of Purim.**

III. Let's ask what is God teaching us through the life of Esther who risked her life for God's people?

1. God is the biggest risk taker.

Think of his creating Adam and Eve, giving the ability to make choices. That was certainly a risky adventure. We know what happened. They disobeyed the Lord and He intervened with his grace and forgiveness. His selecting of Abraham, who had challenges, then Isaac and Jacob. Then Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The challenges God had with the Israelites in their murmuring and unbelief. In spite of their antics, God kept working with them. Eventually having to send both the northern and southern kingdoms into captivity because of their idolatry. Now in Esther, God seemingly silent is working behind the scenes, yet through Mordecai and Esther, who have a rather weak faith, He accomplishes deliverance for His people. Talk about risk. Then God finally sent His Son with His unconditional love into the world to be the Savior (the ultimate of risk), and they crucified Him. Yet He died for all us while we were yet sinners in order to provide us His forgiveness and eternal life. Christ's risk for us now gives us the opportunity through faith in Christ to risk for HIM!! Thinking about risk taking, take time to think about the biblical God.

2. **If the word of God is telling you to go do something, and it's risky, you better ask God's help and start doing what God's Word tells you to do, even if you don't know the outcome (II Corinthians 5:7; Philippians 4:13).**
3. **Risking for God following Him by faith as His Word directs throws political correctness to the wind. Obeying God is the key (I Corinthians 9:15) "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel."**
4. **God blesses risk taking when it is done in faith according to His word (Hebrews 11:6).**
5. **In some risks, it's good to get the counsel of others before taking that risk (Proverbs 11:14 – In the abundance of counselors there is victory."**
6. **It's wise to prepare your heart with prayer, even fasting if one is going to take a risk with God in a certain venture (Philippians 4:6-7).**
7. **Be at peace in your heart that God wants you to take a particular risk (Colossians 3:15). Such as making a specific decision.**

Questions: What is God challenging you and me to risk for Him? Is it to mend a relationship and start anew? Is it to be more faithful in prayer and personal Bible study. Is it to be a witness for Christ to someone I know? Is God challenging you to reach out to someone in need that you know. Or maybe, for some of our young people, it's to start thinking about training to serve the Lord in full time Christian ministry. Perhaps, for someone it is to take a short term missions trip.

Hudson Taylor, the great man of faith who founded the China Inland Mission, integrated faith and risk. He said, "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith."

"One of the reasons why mature people stop growing and learning, someone has said, is that they become less and less willing to risk failure."

Someone else has said, "You cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore."

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotion, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat. – So said Theodore Roosevelt

**Yes,
There was a very cautious man
Who never laughed or played;
He never risked, he never tried,
He never sang or prayed.
And when he one day passed away
His insurance was denied;
For since he never really lived,
They claimed he never died!**

As we come to Thanksgiving day we pause for a moment and think about those who were willing to risk their lives for the Lord - the first pilgrims who came on the Mayflower traveling some 3000 miles taking some 65 days, ending up at Plymouth, MA. That first winter in 1620 was so

challenging that about 50 of the 110 or so who had traveled on that ship died. It was a long and bitter winter. But they did not give up. (Mayflower Slide).

William Bradford wrote:

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: "Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity," etc. "Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good: and his mercies endure forever. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, show how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them." "Let them confess before the Lord His lovingkindness and His wonderful works before the sons of men."

At another time, Bradford wrote:

"They knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country.

The summer of 1621 the Pilgrims reaped a bountiful harvest and declared a three-day feast in December 1621 to thank God and to celebrate with their Indian friends. It has been called America's first Thanksgiving Festival. Ninety Wampanoag Indians joined the 50 Pilgrims for three days of feasting. (slide of portraying first Thanksgiving).

Then in 1623, William Bradford the Governor of the colony made this proclamation:

Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.

The Pilgrim practice of designating a time of Thanksgiving spread into neighboring colonies and became an annual tradition.

America's first national Thanksgiving occurred in 1789.

In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began celebrating Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of each November.

In 1941, Congress permanently established the fourth Thursday of each November as the national Thanksgiving holiday.

The pilgrims should certainly encourage us to risk for the LORD.

Perhaps this prayer will summarize the challenge God is giving us through Esther and the Pilgrims this morning.

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.

Sir Frances Drake Quoted in OC Missionary Prayer Letter of Jeanie Curryer, September, 1997

Yes, forgetting what is behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead, we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Let's risk with our Lord this week!