

# “Divine Opportunities”

Allan Pole on Saturday evening, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022



Theme: The Lord is looking for prepared people.

Texts: Esther 4:9-17 and Ephesians 5:15-18

Here's a thought: Martin Luther King Jr. concluded, "A man who won't die for something is not fit to live."

Some say that on his retreat from Greece after his great military expedition there, King Xerxes boarded a Phoenician ship along with a number of his Persian troops. A fearful storm came up, and the captain told Xerxes there was no hope unless they lightened the ship's load. The king turned to his fellow Persians on deck and said, "It is on you that my safety depends. Now let some of you show your regard for your king." A number of the men bowed to Xerxes and jumped overboard!

Lightened of its load, the ship made it safely to harbour. Xerxes immediately ordered that the pilot receive a golden crown for preserving the king's life – then had the man beheaded for causing the loss of so many Persian lives!

Esther 2:5-7 introduces us to Mordecai and Esther, who lived in this era:

5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. NIV

The name Mordecai means contrition or remorse; bitter; bruising. Mordecai is hardly a joyful name to bring cheer and celebration! There is a reason for such pessimism because Mordecai was probably born in Babylonia when they held the Jewish people captive. He was a resident of Susa, the Persian capital, during the reign of Ahasuerus or Xerxes I, the king of Persia who ruled from 486 to 465 B.C.

The Lord used Mordecai at a crucial time in history because he was ready.

## Mordecai Honoured God More Than People



When Mordecai's uncle, Abihail, died, Mordecai took his orphaned cousin, Hadassah or Esther, into his home as his adopted daughter. Esther became a beautiful young woman – so beautiful that she eventually became the Queen of Persia.

When two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, conspired to assassinate King Xerxes, Mordecai discovered the plot and exposed it, saving the king's life (Esther 2:21-22). The royal chronicles of Persia recorded Mordecai's good deeds (Esther 2:23). Although Mordecai reported potential assassins and saved the king's life, he was neither rewarded nor did he seek a reward. His priority was honouring God rather than being recognized by people – even the king.

We then come to a personal conflict for Mordecai in Esther 3:1-6:

1 After these events [of Mordecai revealing the assassination attempt], King Xerxes honoured Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honour higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honour to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour. 3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behaviour would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honour, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. NIV

Mordecai showed his loyalty to God by refusing to bow to Haman, the official second to the king. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, when the Persians bowed before their king, they paid homage to him as they would to a god. Mordecai, a Jew, would not condone such idolatry.

By the way, did you know the largest knight at King Arthur's round table was Sir Cumference? He acquired his size from too much pi.

Mordecai was related to King Saul, who had lived more than 500 years before him. The Lord had told King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 to wipe out the Amalekites, their King Agag and their livestock because of their thorough corruption. Saul disobeyed God and let him and their livestock live. However, since King Saul spared King Agag, it is possible that Saul either spared not just Agag but other members of the Amalekite royal house or allowed them to escape in the careless way he acted on God's commandment.

Remember: It is better to die for a conviction than to live with a compromise.

The houses of Saul and Agag met again in Mordecai and Haman, a descendant of Agag. Haman had a deep-seated hatred toward the Jews, and this could well have come from resentment over his ancestors' defeat at their hands more than 500 years earlier.

Mordecai could have gone along with the crowd and bowed down to Haman. Instead, he lived with the awareness that God is alive and well, watching and listening in his everyday life.

The Lord declares in 1 Samuel 2:30, "Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained." NIV

Proverbs 29:25-26 calls us to remember who is sovereign:

25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe. 26 Many seek an audience with a ruler, but it is from the Lord that man gets justice. NIV



A few years ago, I was at a community event where the then-mayor of Calgary, Naheed Nenshi, was scheduled to speak. Other activities and conversations were happening, but many people kept one eye on the door for the moment he arrived. You could feel the anticipation of his arrival in the air when he walked into the room amid gasps and whispers, "He's here! He's here!" Cameras flashed, and people rushed to him to shake his hand and take their photos with him. I'm pretty sure he doesn't get this kind of attention now that he is no longer the mayor of Calgary.

How do *we* react when we get to meet someone well known? Do we live each day with an awareness that the God of heaven and earth is watching and listening?

Mordecai Honoured God More Than People  
**Mordecai Was Willing to Pay the Price**



Haman continued to burn with anger over Mordecai's refusal to bow down and pay him honour. He saw this as an opportunity to rid the earth of all Jewish people. Haman convinced the king to issue a command to destroy the Jews and seize their property on a specific day. When news of this command reached Mordecai through Queen Esther's attendant, Hathach, he and his fellow Jews wept. Then he realized that someone must do something about this wicked plan. Mordecai sent a message to Esther, urging her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

We rejoin the story in Esther 4:9-17:

9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. NIV

Mordecai reminded his cousin, who had become *Queen* Esther, of her God-given opportunity to expose Haman to the king and save her people (Esther chapters 3 and 4). I wonder what would have happened if Mordecai did not decide to risk his life and his beloved Esther's life. He could have tried to flee this genocide by abandoning his fellow Jews. Would Esther have had the courage to approach the king on behalf of the Jews without Mordecai's influence? In this crisis, Esther demonstrated that she had caught Mordecai's heart and willingness to pay the price when necessary.

The door of an execution chamber had this sign posted on it:



We can only speculate how the outcome might have been different, but the plot turned against Haman. Ironically, they executed him on the same gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10). Mordecai succeeded Haman and became second in command to the most powerful man in the world at that time. He used his new position to encourage his people to defend themselves against the scheduled massacre planned by Haman. Persian officials also assisted in protecting the Jews, an event celebrated by the annual Feast of Purim (which is not a banquet for contented cats).

Martin Luther King Jr. concluded, “A man who won’t die for something is not fit to live.”

While Mordecai pointed out to Esther her divine opportunity to affect history, he had *his* opportunity to affect history. He saw his influence on Esther and her position not just as a privilege but as a responsibility.

The Lord has given us blessings to be enjoyed *and* to be shared. These blessings include our time, money, possessions, gifts, abilities and talents. He grants these to us not so we will be rich and famous but to accomplish His purposes in us and through us. Realizing these opportunities is the essence of stewardship when we recognize that God owns everything and we are simply managers.

It is with this mindset that the Apostle Paul writes Ephesians 5:15-18:  
15 Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. NIV

Let’s take an inventory: what do we have that we could share with others?

What divine appointments is the Lord setting up for us?

There is a typical quality among the well-known and unsung heroes in the Bible – they were ready for divine opportunities. We can miss these opportunities when we focus on being comfortable, safe and secure. When we

see a crisis as an opportunity, our lives don't become *less challenging* but *more satisfying*.

The Lord used Mordecai at a crucial time in history because he was ready.

**Mordecai Honoured God More Than People**  
**Mordecai Was Willing to Pay the Price**

The Lord is looking for prepared people.

