

## WHEN YOU ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE, PT. 1

### Next Steps Devotional Guide

#### Sermon Series: Esther — For Such A Time As This

October 16, 2022

Kelly Stanley

1. Our lives are pretty predictable. Nearly every person lives by a schedule — that for all practical purposes — is the same. We go through the same morning rituals. We do not have angels awakening us to the “Hallelujah Chorus.” Everyone once in a while there is a day that God and/or life throws us a curve ball that gets our attention. For Noah, it was, “Build an Ark.” For Moses, it was, “Lead My people out of Egypt.” For a teenage boy named David, it was, “You will be king.” For the disciples and us today, it was “He’s alive.” When has God thrown you a curve ball that got your attention? What was it and how did you respond to it? What did you learn from it?
2. You learned last week that some argue that the reason God is never mentioned in the Book of Esther is because it is either too profane, or it is propaganda, or it is a parable. Pastor Kelly said it is all because of providence. Pastor and author J. Vernon McGee said this, “*Providence is the hand of God in the glove of history.*” When God seems absent in your life, how does this quote help you?
3. Every single person is vulnerable to spiritual dangers, temptations and reacting in the wrong way. In Esther 2, we see six primary ways we are. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:1. We see that after some time, King Xerxes is feeling some guilt and regret over banishing, divorcing and removing Queen Vashti’s title. He did this because his 7 royal nobles advised him to do this when she refused to appear before King Xerxes’ drunk fest only wearing her turban. She did the right thing. Think back over your life, what are some spiritual regrets you have that maybe even today you still carry some guilt from them? How and why did these regrets impact you so deeply?
4. One thing Genesis 3 is very clear about is we all have a tendency to blame others for our sin and when we are confronted, instead of humbly accepting it, we get defensive and shuck our responsibility. Adam blamed God for creating Eve. Eve blamed the snake. Cain blamed Abel. And since the first family sinned, we all have tried to find ways to escape the inevitable — our role in our own sin. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:1 again. We learn that as King Xerxes’ anger, regret and guilt worked on him, he began to transfer all of that to his 7 royal nobles. So they worked quickly to come up with another plan to escape King Xerxes putting a death notice on them. When we blame, we have chosen to “B — lame.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. We are so easily manipulated and gullible. They say, “*The squeaky wheel gets the oil.*” While that may be true, the Bible says in Proverbs 30:31, “*Charm is deceptive*” (NLT).
  - a. When God decided to replace King Saul with another king. God had Samuel go to the home of Jesse. Jesse had 9 sons. Eight were present and one, David, was out in the fields tending to the sheep. And as each son passed, God rejected them and the prophet Samuel wondered why. God told Samuel the “why” in 1 Samuel 16:7, “*The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (NLT). After going through all 8 sons of Jesse, Samuel inquires if there are any other sons. Jesse affirms that is one more — David. Samuel has him brought before him and God said, “*He is the one.*” Samuel anointed the youngest son of Jesse to be the next king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 13:14, God called David, “*a man after My own heart.*” Why do you think we are so vulnerable to base our relationships on godless charm rather than godly character? When have you done this? Why? What happened?
  - a. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:3. Now read the explanations for the Hebrew words translated as “beautiful” and “virgins.” The selection of the next queen will not be based on her character, but her charm — her appearance — her beauty. Judging people this way is nothing new to just Persia. It is in our present time too. Why do you think we judge and evaluate people more on their outward appearance rather than the character and integrity of their heart?
  - b. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:4 as well as the explanations for the Hebrew word translated as “pleases.” The selection of the next queen of Persia is not limited to her beauty, charm and appearance, but it includes her sexuality and sensuality. Why do you think our culture is so obsessed with sex today?
  - c. The idea the 7 royal nobles came up with to select the next queen of Persia had to be a shock to those in Persia. Why? Persian Law specifically stated that a Persian queen could only come from one of the 7 royal noble families. In essence, these 7 royal noble advisors as well as King Xerxes violate their own Persian Law. To select a queen from a commoner or from peasant families was unheard of in that day. So, why did these 7 royal noble advisors suggest this to King Xerxes? Because Queen Vashti had to be a family member from one of these 7 royal noble families. If King Xerxes did this to Queen Vashti, he could do it again. When you bent the rules or violated the rules or God’s Word to get what you wanted? What were the results?
6. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:5-6. We learn from early in this story that it is not King Xerxes and the 7 royal nobles who have an agenda, but so does Mordecai.

- a. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:5-6. We are given some historical information about Mordecai's ancestors. He is the son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. In point #4, read 1 Samuel 9:2. Both men are from the clan as King Saul. The Hebrew leads us to believe they were part of the nobility class. Why? They are mentioned in Esther 2:5-6 along with King Jehoiachin, who was carried off by King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. In Hebrew, mentioning them in Hebrew implies these two men were of royal descent.
    - i. Kish was in the royal family of Israel's King Jehoiachin, who he and his royal family were taken by King Nebuchadnezzar in one of three military campaigns between 606 BC, 598 BC, and 586 BC. He was a descendant of King Saul, who ruled Israel from 1,021 - 1,000 BC. As a result, Kish would have wanted a descendant of King Saul to be the next king, not God's choice of David through the prophet Samuel. This created hatred, jealous, spite and enmity between the family of Saul and the family of David and eventually, David's son Solomon.
    - ii. Therefore, the Hebrew text implies that Kish' ancestors from the time of King Saul had been passing down a grudge against descendants of King David and King Solomon. The way they demonstrated this was they rejected all their Jewish heritage, their Jewish faith and God. They immersed themselves in both Babylonian and Persian culture.
    - iii. "Mordecai" is not his Jewish name. His father gave him a Babylonian name. He was named after the Babylonian god, Marduk. His Babylonian name means "immortal son" and "sun god." it was the attitude that thought, *"If we can't have one of our own noble and royal family members on the throne, then we go even higher. We give names that imply we are a god unto ourselves."* This was the very same temptation the snake made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. And ever since, we have lived our lives as if we were gods, only calling on God for the really big things. Look at your life. Where do you do this?
  - b. And there is a second player mentioned in Mordecai's ancestry — Shimei. Read 2 Samuel 16:5-8 in point #4 in your sermon notes. Shimei cursed David and David's family. Read 1 Kings 2:9 in your sermon notes. As King David was on his death bed, he told his son Solomon to avenge in blood — find a way to kill Shimei — for cursing him. Read 1 Kings 2:36-46 in your sermon notes. The last viable descendant of King Saul is killed, ending any possibility in the future for someone from the clan of Saul to be king. So, from the time of Saul, David and Solomon, a grudge — a family feud — a clan feud kept going for over 500 years. The writer of the Book of Esther gives us this information so we understand Mordecai and why he does what he does. America has seen its family feuds such as the Hatfields verses the McCoys and the Earp Family verses the Clanton Family. Why do you think families fuel such feuds? Is there any kind of feud in your own family?
7. When someone pushes our buttons, we are vulnerable to return to our old sinful nature. Read Romans 6:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 in your sermon notes. When you sin, how broken are you over your sin? Are you broken? Are you devastated you chose to sin? Or do you make excuses, play it down?
- a. Whatever God calls sin, you and I ned to call it sin too. It's not a struggle. It's not a weakness. It is not a bad habit. It is not even an addiction. It . . . is . . . sin. Jesus died on the cross so that you and I would be dead to sin. How intentional are you to take responsibility for your sin?
  - b. Read 1 Peter 1:16 in your sermon notes. Peter draws from 7 Old Testament passages where God commands His people to *"be holy as He is holy."* Meaning we intentionally set ourself apart to be different out of gratitude and love to Jesus what what He did for us on the cross. When God looks at you, does He see someone who is becoming more and more like Christ or one who accommodates to our culture? Explain.
  - c. Read Jesus' words in John 14:15. Jesus said the undeniable proof that we love Him is not in going to church. It is not in serving in a church. It is not tithing. It is in obeying Him.
8. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:10. Not only had Mordecai kept his Jewish heritage a secret, so had Esther.
- a. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:7. We are given both her Jewish name (Hadassah) and her Persian name (Esther). Read the meaning of what these names meant in your sermon notes. Take your Bible and read Isaiah 55:13 and Zechariah 1:8-10. How would these impact both Mordecai and Esther?
  - b. The Hebrew says that Esther was *"beautiful in form and lovely to look at."* If one peasant girl a day was brought before King Xerxes to test as the next potential queen before he got to Esther, that would be 1,460 teenage virgin girls. Mordecai finally believes he has a chance to cash in on his cousin's good looks. He could use her beauty as a means to further his ambition for his own career. Have you ever used someone to advance something you wanted? What happened?
  - c. Many so called Christians do not mind if their lost friends and associates know they go to church. They just don't want them to know they have come to Christ. Take your Bible and read Jesus' words in Matthew 10:34-39. Everyone is vulnerable to deny Christ. There are unlimited ways we do this: using profanity; sexual immorality; lying; gossiping; not reading our Bible; not praying; and etc. Do Jesus' words in Matthew 10:34-39 impact you at all? If so, how?
  - d. In the middle of the word "SIN" is the letter I. What does this tell you? How broken are you over your own sin? do you excuse it? Minimize it? Rationalize it? If confronted by someone, do you get defensive and mad or are you humble and accepting?