

WHEN YOU ARE CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK & A HARD PLACE, PT. 2

Next Steps Devotional Guide — Esther 2:8-18

Sermon Series: Esther — For Such A Time As This

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1. Parents will say to their children, “Listen to me. Listen.” God, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, begins with “listen.” It is the Hebrew verb “Shema.” It is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:27-39 in the New Testament. In what ways in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 does God tell His people how to listen that know how to respond when they are caught between a rock and a hard place.
2. Our American culture and even some churches are absolutely going crazy and wild. Read Proverbs 29:18a in your sermon outline. People are attempting to undo what our Founding Fathers established. People today feel they are an authority themselves. In many churches, there are people who will hear or read the Bible and either decide to ignore it or redefine it. Where have you see or experience this?
3. Read Genesis 3:5 in your sermon outline. Making God in our own image is a heretical theology that is permeating many churches today. There are even pastors who preach “you are a little god” because we are created in God’s image. Where in your own life have you prone to elevate yourself as “the authority” or a “little god”?
4. Read Jeremiah 31:30-31 in your sermon notes. As God inspired Jeremiah to write this, he has been imprisoned by Judah’s king, King Zedekiah for prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by an invading army. That army was Babylon, who invaded and destroyed Judah, Jerusalem and the Temple in 3 military campaigns in 606BC, 598 BC and 586 BC. In each of these, King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s king carried off thousands of Judah’s nobility, young, the most skilled and wealthy. Why do think people will not listen to God’s warnings?
5. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:8. Esther is selected to be considered as the next queen due to her physical appearance. Esther 2:8 states that Esther was taken by force or against her will to be in this selection process. The requirement for the next queen is she has to be a teenage virgin girl who has reached sexual maturity.
 - a. Thousands of these teenage virgin girls who were sexually mature are competing for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to go from being a peasant to a princess or in this case, the queen. Esther would have 3 major hurdles against her: she is an orphan, there is some fierce competition and she is a Jew — which later becomes an issue once she is queen. Yet, she has something BIG going for her. She has the providence of God working behind the scenes to get this accomplished. When, where and what has God worked behind the scenes in your own life to get something accomplished for you?
 - b. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:10 that Esther had not let anyone know she was a Jewess. Has there ever been a time in your life where you kept your Christian faith hidden from others? Why and what happened?
 - c. Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, makes sure that no one in the Persian government know they are Jewish. Maybe he felt it was up to them to use their own wits to survive. Have you ever felt abandoned by God and then relied on your own wits to get through something? If so, where, where and what happened? What did you learn from this?
 - d. Read Jeremiah 31:36-37, Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5, and Romans 8:38-39 in your sermon outline. What do these passages tell you? How can you apply this truth to your life consistently?
 - e. We live in a political world and there is always some kind of fallout that occurs when you feel you are on the wrong side. Maybe this is a second reason Mordecai had them keep their Jewish heritage a secret. Persian Law stated the queen had to be selected from one of the seven royal noble families. Have you ever experienced any political fallout or horrible consequences for your faith in Christ? Explain.
 - f. A third possible reason Mordecai had them keep their Jewish heritage a secret is maybe he felt they had been abandoned by God. Has there ever been a time in your life you felt abandoned by God? Explain.
6. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:9. We learn that Esther “pleased” the king and won his “favor.” Read the explanation of the Hebrew word translated as “pleased” and the Hebrew word translated as “favor.” What does this tell you?
7. Esther’s mentor, a eunuch named Hegai, realizes quickly that Esther is humble, modest and teachable. She was not a “know-it-all.” Everyone at some time acts like they are a “know-it-all?” When do you?
8. When life comes at you hard, it is easy to feel you are alone — to believe God is not there. Yes, God is invisible, but that does not mean He is not involved. He is. God will make sure that His invincible purpose for your life is fulfilled. When you find yourself in the vice-grip of feeling abandoned by God, do you live and act knowing though God is invisible, He is involved in getting His invincible purpose accomplished in your life? Explain.
9. Take your Bible and Read Esther 2:11. Mordecai is left in the dark with his niece now being selected to be tested by the king as a potential queen. He is pacing back and forth every day going by where Esther is now housed. The Hebrew text is written to convey he was anxious, biting his nails, nervous, fearful, and even doubting. Why do you think he is feeling these intense emotions? Does this describe you when you are in dark? Explain.
10. Take your Bible and read Esther 2:12. Esther will go through a 12-month beauty treatment program before she is presented to the king for his evaluation. The Persian culture saw the physical as merely a gateway to the spiritual. In their mind, cleanliness was next to godliness. Persians believed that one’s body odor or smell or aroma connected them to their pagan gods accepting them. They believed that makeup, perfumes, bracelets, eyeliner, fingernail polish, lipstick and any cosmetics brought them closer to their gods. Our American culture is saturated

with good looks, appearances, cosmetics, clothing and etc. What do you rely on that you think brings you closer to God and why?

11. Take your Bible and read [Esther 2:13](#). Before each teenage spiritually mature virgin was taken to the king's bedchamber, she was allowed to freely choose whatever clothing and jewelry she wanted to take with her. Why? It would reveal to the king something about her character. Think about your own personal possessions. What do you reveal about your character?
12. Take your Bible and read [Esther 2:14](#). There is simply no way to sanitize the implications here.
 - a. This is why one Bible scholar describes [verse 14](#) this way: *"This contest would become nothing less than a sordid meat market."*¹ Where in our culture are women and people seen as nothing more than objects to be used, abused and discarded?
 - b. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. It came out between third and first centuries BC. When it did, the translators were disturbed that the Book of Esther never mentioned God and was very graphic. So, they added this verse to the Greek translation to clean it up or sanitize it. Esther says in the Septuagint Translation, *"You know everything God; and You know that I hate the pomp of the wicked, and the bed of the uncircumcised and any foreigner."*² Have you ever "sanitized" a Bible passage to others? Why or why not?
 - c. Even today, some evangelical Christian pastors and teachers attempt to exonerate Esther, try to sanitize this verse and make Esther a hero, say the word translated in [Esther 2:14](#) as "taken" [בָּאָה, ba-ah] means she was taken against her will to go to the king's bedchamber. The problem with that is that this same word is used to refer to Mordecai taking Esther as his daughter in [Esther 2:15](#). If that is the case, then it would say that Mordecai was guilty of forcing his niece into incest with him. Do you think this is right? Why or why not?
 - d. Take your Bible and read [Esther 2:15](#) again. Esther goes willing to the king. Hegai, the king's eunuch, along with these 7 female attendants from the king's harem, give her the details of what King Xerxes likes in bed. If there is anything positive here, it is that Esther relied on the experience and wisdom of others rather than her own charm and wits. This shows she had humility and an attitude to do what those who were older and more experience knew to be true. Do you go to the older, more spiritually mature Christians for advice? Why or why not? If you are an older, more spiritually mature Christian, do the young come to you? Why or why not?
13. Take your Bible and read [Esther 2:16-17](#). There is simply no honest way to present this other than the way the Bible describes it. Christian scholar Stephen Davey writes: *"So ... let me tell you what Esther lost. Esther might have gained the title of Queen, but she didn't gain a husband. There is no mention she was made the wife of King Xerxes — just his queen."*³ Esther was King Xerxes' queen, but not his wife. Oh, he loved her but he also loved all the other women as well. This was not romance; it was raunchiness. It wasn't love, but lust. The Hebrew text implies that King Xerxes' "love" for Esther was limited to her beauty and her ability to please him sexually. If you were advising a your Christian couple about marriage, how would you define "romance" and "love" to them?
14. Take your Bible and read [Esther 2:18](#). The king throws a banquet in Esther's honor. King Xerxes made it an official Persian holiday — meaning he had a remission of taxes. Second, he honored her in comparison he had dishonored Queen Vashti. Why do you think he did this?
15. Read [Isaiah 55:8-9](#) in your sermon outline. God is not responsible for the sinful choices that Esther made to become queen. Knowing her character, God worked behind the scenes to get her into that position to save the Jews living in Persia later and eventually help secure the way for the Jewish Messiah, Jesus to be born. When God anointed David to be king over Israel, God called David "a man after My own heart" in [1 Samuel 13:14](#). Knowing the horrendous sins King David made (e.g., idolatry, adultery, murder, envy — most of the Ten Commandments) and etc.), 1,000 years later in [Acts 13:22](#), God was still calling David this. How is this possible?
16. In a few weeks we will have an election. It is important to remember that whoever is in power politically, God is in control universally. Read [Proverbs 21:1](#) and [Proverbs 16:9](#) in your sermon outline. What do these tell you?
17. No one is as forgiving, understanding, merciful and loving as God. When He gives us a promise, unlike us, He keeps His promises. Read [John 10:27-28](#) and [2 Timothy 2:13](#) in your sermon notes. Do you trust these verses?
18. One of the greatest mysteries is that God uses sinful people to demonstrate His incomprehensible grace. Read [Deuteronomy 7:3-4](#), [Hebrews 4:16](#), [Romans 3:24](#), and [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) in your sermon outline. What do these tell you about God's grace to you. Now take your Bible and read [Titus 3:7](#) and [Ephesians 4:7](#). What do these passages say to you about God's grace?
19. Everyone wants to love and accepted. Read Jesus' words in [John 17:14-17](#) and [Romans 12:2](#) in your sermon outline. If you had to prove in a court of law that you live in this world, but you are not of it. What evidence could you present that would not be questioned or throw out?
20. One of the marks of maturity is that you are willing to ask for help, take advice, you are teachable, you find wiser and more spiritually mature believers to mentor and disciple you. Read [Proverbs 9:10](#), [Proverbs 1:7](#), and [Psalm 71:18](#) in your sermon outline. Do these verses describe you? Why or why not?
21. Read [Matthew 28:19-20](#) in your sermon outline. The only actual verb in this passage is "make disciples." Is this you? Why or why not?
22. Read [1 Samuel 15:22-23](#) in your sermon outline. Do you trust and obey God completely? Why or why not?

¹ Colin D. Jones, [Exploring Esther: Serving the Unseen God](#) (Day One Publications, 2005), p. 40.

² John C. Whitcomb, [Esther: Triumph of God's Sovereignty](#) (Moody Press, 1979), p. 50.

³ Stephen Davey, [Wisdom Commentary Series](#), "Esther," p. 44.