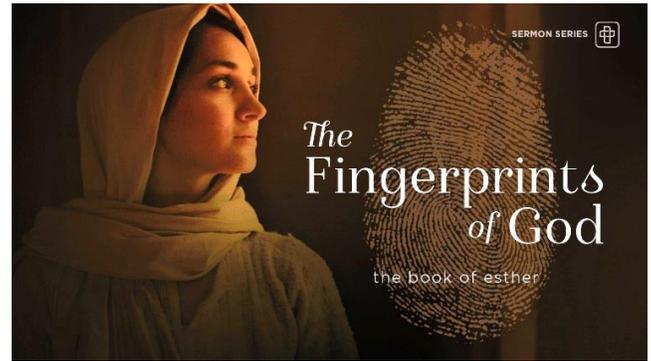


A Choice Between Death & Death

David Sunday

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Cassie: The sermon text today comes from Esther 4:

¹ 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. ² 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.

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. ⁹ And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

¹⁰ Then 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."

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?"

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.

This is God's Word.

David: Thank you, Cassie. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, apart from You we can do nothing. So we pray for illumination of Your Holy Spirit upon our minds and hearts, and His empowerment upon my preaching. Lord, I pray that we would see Christ afresh in His Word this morning, for Your glory and for our everlasting good. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Mark Campisano was on a flight from London to New York and was crunched in the airplane seat next to a senior partner in his firm. It was time for dinner and with the arrival of the meal came a moment of decision. Should Mark pray and give thanks for the food, as was his custom? He knew that many of his colleagues were not favorable to Christianity and he also knew Jesus said we shouldn't do our works of piety before people to be noticed by them. So he tried to be as inconspicuous as possible when he bowed his head to pray. But, as Bethany Jenkins tells the story, Mark wasn't subtle enough.

Immediately his senior partner said in a booming voice, "What are you doing—praying? You're not a Christian, are you?" Mark felt a bit trapped, but the words of Jesus came to mind. "*Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32). So he gulped, then replied, "As a matter of fact, I am a Christian." There was silence, then his senior partner smiled, winked and said, "Good. I am too. Can you thank God for both our meals?" Relief!

This does raise the question however. How much is it worth to you to be identified as one of God's people? Are you willing to identify with Christ and His people no matter what it costs you? If being known as a Christian invites persecution or ridicule, as well as loss of status, wealth, favor or security, are you ready to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the

fleeting pleasures of sin? Are you prepared to regard disgrace for the sake of Christ to be greater than all the treasures of this world?

To be in God's family means to identify with a people in grave peril.

This is a choice none of us can ultimately escape—mistreatment with the people of God versus the fleeting pleasures of sin in this world, disgrace for the sake of Christ versus the treasures of this world. Yet Mordecai made his choice. Look at verses one through three. Here we see that to be in God's family, to be one of God's people, means to identify with a people who are in grave peril in this world.

In order to picture this scene in verses one through three, you need to remember what set this up. In chapter three, there was a man named Haman who belonged to a nation that had been adversaries to God's people for hundreds of years—the Amalekites who had kicked them when they were down. Haman had just been appointed the chief counselor to the king, so the king said, “Everyone needs to bow down and pay homage to Haman.” But Mordecai refused to do so.

This then infuriated Haman and resulted in him going to King Ahasuerus and manipulating the king to issue the decree we read in Esther 3:13: *“To destroy, to kill and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.”* Now, a decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked. Once these kings took off their royal signet ring and issued a decree, they weren't going to go back on their word. This would bring shame on the king. So the people of God are in dire straits. Things couldn't get any bleaker than this.

If I were Mordecai, I'd be feeling personally responsible. I'd be wondering, “Was it my stand on principle, my refusal to bow to Haman, that is now going to bring about the genocide of all my people?” So he's in distress. He's in agony. You've got to picture what's happening in Esther 4:1 as this decree dawns on Mordecai and he realizes the trouble his people are in. So he takes hold of his clothing and tears it apart. His broken heart is bursting through the seams.

He goes home, strips off his shredded garments, finds an old scratchy burlap piece of sackcloth and wraps it around his skin. Then he goes to the fireplace and scoops up some old ashes, pouring them all over his head. He stumbles out into the center of the city, weeping and wailing like the survivor of a nuclear bomb blast. He's crying out with a loud and bitter cry. He's not hiding his identity any longer. He's going to weep with those who weep. He's making a public spectacle of his solidarity with God's people and knows full well what it's going to cost him eleven months from now. He also knows it's costing him right now, this very day.

We're told in verse two that no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. This was a Persian king and you don't show up in his presence looking all sad and disheveled like that. So Mordecai is choosing to be an outcast in the Persian empire in order to be a member of God's people. He's choosing mistreatment with the people of God instead of the fleeting pleasures of the Persian palace. He's choosing disgrace for the sake of Messiah's people instead of all the treasures of Persia. And throughout the empire, God's people are doing the same thing he's doing. *"There was great mourning,"* verse 3 says, *"among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes."*

As we see this devastation, lamentation, mourning and grief, it invites all of us to consider what would we do if we knew that a day had been fixed when the world as we know it was going to come to an end? What would we do if we knew that a decree of destruction upon the whole world was made? In fact, such a day has been fixed. God in His great patience and mercy has made it very clear for all of us. He wants all to know, because He is not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). So He says ever so clearly, warning us in 2 Peter 3:10, that *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare"* (NIV).

This is a fact. This is God's Word, warning us that such a day is coming. Peter continues in verse 11, *"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?"* Since you know that a day of utter devastation is coming upon the world, what kind of people ought you to be? This isn't the only place in the Bible we're told something like. We see it again in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 (NIV):

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

What is the Bible telling us? It's telling us that the world as we know it will come to an end, that the date has been set and that all our works will be exposed for what they really are. Each and every one of us is going to be summoned to stand before the God Who created us and give an account for our lives. The heavens and the earth and everything we've worked for and clung to in this world will be dissolved, then out of the ashes will emerge a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. The only people who will be able to live in that new heaven and that new earth are those who have been declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.

Nothing matters more than this. Are you prepared for that day? The rock-bottom reality is that when the Day of the Lord comes, if you and I got what we deserve, it would not be deliverance. It would not be salvation. It would not be life forever in the new heaven and the new earth. What we deserve is death, judgment and hell for our sins. If we realized what we deserved, we'd feel like Mordecai is feeling in this passage—the infinite weight of our sins. The absolute justice of God's judgment and the sobering reality of hell would overwhelm us, so we would do what Mordecai and all the Jews in the Persian empire did. We would repent. We'd bow before the Lord and plead with Him for mercy. It's what God's people were doing all over Persia.

With every day that passes, they realize, "We're 24 hours closer to the decree that spells our doom; we have no hope, no other plea, than crying out to God for mercy." They're heeding the word of the Lord spoken through the prophet Joel in Joel 2:12-14: *"Even now, declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning'"* (NIV).

That's what they're doing here in Esther. God says, *"Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God..."* Why? Listen to this: *"...for he is gracious and compassionate."* This is the character of God. He is a gracious and compassionate God. I love the words *"slow to anger."* God is slow to anger and is *"abounding in love; and he relents from sending calamity."* If you repent, he will relent from sending calamity, Joel says. *"Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing."* He will pour out mercy on your life if you will repent. So, *"Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly."* That's what God's people were doing in Persia.

If you believed what they believed, if you believed that a day of judgment was fast approaching and that a decree of destruction was hanging over your head because of your sin, then you would do the same thing they're doing. You'd respond like they responded. You would humble yourself. You would repent. You'd plead with the Lord for mercy. You would look for a Mediator who could come to your defense, plead your case and represent you before the King whose judgment against you will be inescapable and irreversible if a way of salvation cannot be found.

Identifying with God's people involves counting the cost.

Mordecai is looking for a mediator, beginning in verse four. In verses four through 11, we see the cost that will come upon the person who needs to be the mediator for God's people. We see that identifying with God's people involves counting the cost. When Esther's entourage first reports what's going on with her cousin Mordecai—her adopted father—out at the king's gate, she's in great distress. She's thinking, "What's he doing out there weeping and wailing and mourning and looking like this? This isn't the way you're supposed to show up at the king's gate." He's

causing a scene. He's making a disturbance and her first instinct is to do whatever she can to get him to cheer up. So she sends him a nice new set of clothes, hoping that will settle him down. "Come on, Mordecai. Get dressed up. Clean yourself up and get back to normal life here." But Mordecai refuses to accept them.

So Esther has to find out more about what's really going on. She calls one of her most trusted attendants, a eunuch named Hathach, to serve as a go-between. Esther 4:5 says she "*ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why*" (NIV). You see, she's been isolated from God's people all these years in the security of the palace. She doesn't know what's going on with them. She doesn't know the danger they're in. She's totally "out to lunch," so to speak. She's been in a cocoon of isolation and Mordecai needs to get her attention.

So he's very specific in providing a credible threat assessment. He gives her the exact sum of money that Haman promised to pay into the king's treasury for the destruction of the Jews, then he sends a copy of the written decree that's been going all around Persia for the Jews' destruction, so he could show it to Esther. And in verse eight he commanded her to go to the king to beg his favor.

Up to this point in the story, Esther has only done what other people commanded her to do. She's always been passively obedient of people's commands. Even though she's been queen for six years now, her adopted father still thinks he can boss her around and tell her what to do. That's going to change pretty soon. Look at the end Esther 4:8 because there are some very important words there. He commanded her to "*go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him,*" then here are very crucial words, "*on behalf of her people*" (ESV). Very important.

Up to this point, nobody in the palace knows that Esther is a Jew—not even her husband, the king. I mean, nobody knows. She hasn't been observing the dietary restrictions. She hasn't been reading the Torah in public. She hasn't been praying in public, like Daniel did, where everyone could see what was going on. She hasn't been going to the synagogue. She's blended into palace life very comfortably, like a chameleon in that Persian palace.

But now there's another man who knows. He knows that the Jews are her people. And how many people does it take to break a secret? Usually just one. So Mordecai, with that little phrase, "*plead with him on behalf of her people,*" is placing Esther in an incriminating position. Her secret is no longer safe. The man who did everything he could to protect her, the man who had commanded her six years earlier to conceal her identity, now is pressuring her. Now he's manipulating her to make her identity known, doing just the opposite. But she's not going to go along with him so easily anymore, because she's got it pretty good inside the palace.

Esther knows that Mordecai is basically sending her on a suicide mission, so in verse 11 she sends back word, basically saying this: “You know, I know and everyone in the empire knows that no one can just go waltzing into the presence of the Persian king—not even his wife. If you haven’t been invited, if you haven’t been summoned, all you’re asking for is a death sentence if you go into that king’s presence—unless he shows mercy.” And up until now, mercy hasn’t ranked highly in Ahasuerus’ Myers-Briggs profile. Mercy is not one of his strongest personality traits.

Further, Esther informs her cousin-father that her honeymoon is over. It’s actually been over 30 days since she’s last been summoned into the king’s chambers. I’m not a betting man, but if I were, I’d be willing to venture a pretty big bet that this king isn’t spending many nights alone. In fact there’s a hint back in Esther 2:19 that in between Esther’s coronation as queen and this event in chapter four, there’s already been a second gathering of virgins. The king’s harem has been increasing, so Esther’s chance of surviving, if she enrages this king, is about as strong as Vashti’s chance was back in chapter one. She’s putting a lot on the line. It’s an incredibly risky proposition that Mordecai is asking of her.

Put yourself in Esther’s shoes. What would you do? An orphan child, adopted by her cousin, taken into the harem, then made queen. I mean, her life is pretty secure. She’s not Kate Middleton. She’s not Meghan Markle. But for the Persian empire, she’s got more comfort, more power, more wealth and security and status, than pretty much any other woman in the kingdom. Mordecai is commanding her, “Put it all on the line. Risk it all. Risk your very life for the sake of God’s people.” Why? “Because if you won’t become our mediator, if you won’t rescue us from the destruction that’s decreed against us, we have no hope.”

This raises the question what are we willing to lose in order to be identified with God’s people? We live in a secular society that demands that you toe the line. If you want to be accepted, if you want to rise in power, influence, wealth and security in this world—which just about everyone living in the Fox Valley wants to do—you need to recognize that you’re going to have to risk it all in order to be faithful to Christ and His gospel.

Listen, there was a time in American culture when being a Christian was a little more comfortable. It felt a little bit more like life inside the palace. What I mean is that there was a civil religion that held sway over our culture for a while—God and country. Being a Christian felt a little more safe, a little more mainstream in American society. Once upon a time it was easier to be a socially respectable Christian in America. But all of that has been thrown out the window and flushed down the drain, but I don’t think that’s actually a bad thing.

I love how Russell Moore puts it: “The shaking of American culture is no sign that God has given up on American Christianity. In fact, it may be a sign that God is rescuing American

Christianity from itself.” What does he mean by that? He means that when the culture was a little more friendly to the civil religion of God and country, it was too easy for us as Christians to get cozy and comfortable, forgetting who we really are. Who are we in this world? We are exiles here. We are strangers here. That’s our identity. To be a follower of Jesus Christ means we don’t fit. We don’t fit in the palace of the secular left.

The law of the Medes and Persians was on the “left.” It was a totalitarian culture of sexual liberation, reproductive rights and religious intolerance. No one is allowed in that palace to stand up for the rights of women and their unborn children. No one in that palace is going to be able to get away with saying, “I believe marriage is a divine institution for one man and one woman.” You’re a bigot if that’s what you believe in that palace. That palace has no room for you—and they’ll throw you into the moat with the alligators if you resist.

But you’d better be careful, friends, about trying to fit into the palace of the secular right, because there, if you’re not discerning, you might get swept into an agenda of nationalistic pride and capitalistic greed. It will start shouting so loudly that there’s no room in that castle to ask, “Hey, what is our moral duty to the poor, the immigrant and the oppressed? Is America really a nation of liberty and justice for all, or are there groups of people in our country who are being trampled on by the rich and powerful?”

You see, in that palace too, the values of Christ’s Kingdom are not welcome. If you want to identify with Christ and His people, you’ve got to get used to the fact that your status, security, wealth and power in the palaces of this world are constantly at risk. Whatever wealth, influence, power and security God has given you is not yours to keep. He’s entrusted it to you as a steward. He’s stewarded it to you so that you can use what He has given you for Christ and His Kingdom.

You belong to a Kingdom that’s not of this world, and you belong to a King Who rejects worldly wealth, power and influence. He says, “No, I’m going to go the way of the cross,” and He gets nailed to that cross by a Roman empire. If you want to follow Him, He says you’ve got to do the same thing. Look at Mark 8:34-35. These are the words of our Savior Jesus Christ. This is the cost of being His disciples, of identifying with Him and with His people in this world. It hasn’t changed in 2,000 years.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Do you hear what Jesus is saying? You’ve got to be willing to give it all up, to put it all on the line. If you try to hang on to your life in this world—your status, your security, your wealth, your position—if that’s where you’re finding refuge, you’re going to lose it all. What will it profit

you if you gain the whole world, but end up losing your soul (Mark 8:36)? That's the choice that's being set before Esther.

At some defining moment, you will be forced to decide.

As Jim Eliot said, we have a choice to give what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose. That's where we find Esther in verses 12-17, and that's where all of us are going to end up. At some defining moment, we're all going to be forced to decide. That's the message of this last section, Esther 4:12-17. At some defining moment, you will be forced to decide, "Where are my loyalties? To whom do I swear allegiance?"

Esther is at a point where she can't see the happy ending of the story from the frightening middle. She doesn't have any specific promise that God's going to protect her. She doesn't have any prophetic word telling her exactly what she has to do. She has to trust in the Lord. The way out of the darkness that God's people are in is through the darkness, so she's going to have to go into the darkness, into the frightening middle where there's no cell signal and no map to guide her.

If you want to identify with Jesus in this dark world, you can't be afraid of the dark. You've got to go into the darkness where He leads you, into the places of poverty, disease, danger and death. You've got to give up your GPS, put your mobile device on airplane mode and trust God to pilot you through the darkness of this world.

The main thing I want us to see from this chapter this morning is that the choice to identify with God and His people is a choice between death and death. Death to whatever makes you feel secure in this world. "God, my finances, my position, my status, my power, my comfort—they are all Yours. Jesus, You brought me to this place. You've given me all this for such a time as this. Now, use me. It's all Yours, Lord. Take it and use it. Use me however You see fit to advance Your Kingdom and magnify Your glory. Because for me, to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21)." That's death to self, but that's the way of life in Christ's Kingdom.

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to save his life in this world is going to lose it" (Luke 9:24) If you want to save your life, you're going to lose it. But whoever loses his life for Christ and the gospel is going to find it. So it's not a question of you holding on to your life so that you can keep it. No, the choice to save your own life is a choice ultimately to die eternally. But the choice to follow Jesus is a choice to die now to saving your own life, so that you can find the life that is eternal in His Kingdom.

This is why Mordecai says what he says to Esther in verses 13-14. Look at this crucial message:

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. 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."

It's that line, not the next line, that is probably the most significant line in this chapter. What is Mordecai saying here? First, he's saying, "Esther, you can be sure that God will rescue His people." We're not seeing the name of God here, but we're seeing His fingerprints everywhere. We're seeing His hidden hand of providence everywhere, and so is Mordecai. Mordecai is remembering that God made promises to Abraham to make of him a great nation, that whoever blesses the people of Abraham will be blessed and whoever curses them will be cursed. So Mordecai is confident that one way or another, deliverance is going to come for God's people. God will rescue His people.

Then secondly, Mordecai wants her to know, "This is a defining moment for you, Esther. This is your time to decide. No longer can you remain silent. No longer can you conceal your identity. No longer can you just be Esther the queen. You need to now make yourself known as Hadassah, the Hebrew. And if you keep silent..." what does he say? "...[T]he consequences for you will be tragic. You and your father's house will perish. The Jews will be saved, but you'll perish." That word "perish" has the weight of eternity attached to it. It has the idea of divine judgment connected with it.

Mordecai is telling Esther, "This is your defining moment of faith. You need to decide now. Was this religion just your father's religion or is it yours? Is the God of Israel just your father's God or is He your God? Are these people just your father's people or are they your people too? You've been living pretty securely in the palace of this world. Now it's time to decide if you're going to risk it all in order to show your allegiance. If you don't, Esther, God is still going to save His people, but you will prove yourself to be not one of them. Your family line will end. You will live and die as a Persian, excluded from citizenship in Israel, a foreigner to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in this world."

That's what Mordecai is saying to her. "If you won't identify with God and His people, you're going to be lost, Esther." And it comes down to this for each and every one of us. You know, sometimes the stream of God's salvation seems pretty peaceful. You get your feet in the water, get your little gospel flotation device blown up, have your nice drink on the side, hanging out with friends you like, just floating peacefully in that stream. It's so nice to be saved in this world.

But that stream is flowing into a mighty river. And on that river there are some raging rapids and some treacherous rocks. God promises that He will safely guide every one of His people through the rapids and will keep them from crashing against the rocks. But if you're not willing to brave the rapids, at some point you're going to have to exit the stream, because that stream is moving and it's moving into danger. It's moving into places where you will have to trust everything to the One Who promises to save you.

This is Esther's defining moment. Will she brave the rapids for the sake of God and His people? Or is she going to step out of the stream of salvation and choose to be safe in the palace of Persia? I like how Colin Jones puts: "We are never indispensable in God's plan, but we are always responsible for our obedience to it." God's going to save His people with or without us.

Now that Mordecai has made that choice so stark and clear for Esther, she realizes, "I guess I really have no choice. I'm in between a rock and a hard place. It's a choice between death and death." It's just like Redd Foxx put it. "Heroes ain't born—they're cornered." Esther is cornered. She's cornered between the rock of God's unconditional election, God's irresistible grace, God's effectual calling and God's irrevocable determination to preserve His saints.

She can't deny who she is. She knows God has chosen her, that God has been merciful to her, that God has favored her, and now God is calling her. He's brought her to the kingdom for such a time as this to identify with the people of God—with her people—when they're in grave peril. She counts the cost and at last decides to identify with God's people. "*If I perish, I perish,*" she says in verse 16.

In being willing to lose her life for the Messiah and His people, she finds it. Fourteen times in this book she's called Queen Esther. Thirteen of those times are after this moment. This is when she comes into her own. Up to this point, everyone's been telling her what to do. From this point forward, she's the one who's going to be telling everyone else what to do. Once everyone knows who she is, once she's come out of hiding, it's like Esther finally rises into her true identity as a daughter of the King of kings, as an agent of the Kingdom of heaven, serving Christ and His Kingdom in Persia.

Now she realizes, "I can't do this in my own strength." She's not going to get all prettied up, go through three days of beautification, put on all her cosmetics and fanciest clothes, hoping, "Somehow as I crawl into the presence of that king, he will see how pretty I am and he'll want me." That's not her tactic. Instead she says, "I'm going to fast. I'm not going to eat anything. I'm not going to drink anything for three days. And I need all the Jews in Susa to join me in a fast, because God's work cannot be done without God's power, and I am desperate depending on Him now to help me."

That's what God is calling each of us to be and do. I could say to you, "Be more like Esther. Take risks for the Kingdom. Go into the darkness. Identify with the needs of those who are dying. Rescue the perishing. Give it all up, because when money, power, status and influence in this world no longer have you in their shackles, then you will really be free." All of that is true. But if that's where I end it, I'd be leaving you without the power to live that kind of life.

Friends, Esther is an example to us, but she's much more than that. She's a signpost. She's a signpost pointing to a Mediator Who is much stronger and much better than she is. She's showing us in her weakness, in her vulnerability, in her reluctance to act, that there is a Savior much mightier, much more worthy of praise. And when He had mercy on us, we weren't innocent sufferers. We were guilty transgressors, denying the Lord, turning back from following our God.

Isaiah 59:15-16 puts it like this: "*The Lord saw it*" He saw what we were like, "*and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him.*" He sent Someone to intercede for us—the perfect Mediator Who has access to God because He is none other than God Himself. He can fully identify with human beings because He became one of us, like us in every respect, except without sin.

As we ran our hell-bound race, indifferent to the cost, He looked upon our helpless state—the decree of destruction that was looming—and He led us to the cross. There on that cross we see that there is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. There was no one else who could bridge the gulf of separation sin has created between you and your God. But Jesus loves you, died for you and gave Himself up for you. He didn't come into this world saying, "Well, if I perish, I perish." He came saying, "I will perish. I will die. I will give My life as a ransom for many." He did it willingly, out of love.

The greatest risk you could ever take would be to refuse His love for you. The greatest risk you could ever take would be to ignore what He has done on the cross, saying, "I don't need that. I can get along just fine in the palace of this world with my comfort, security, wealth and ease." Friend, that is all going to crumble. That's all going to fall out of your hands. And on the day you stand before God, you will forever lament the day you rejected Christ and refused His mediation for you. Don't do that. Don't take that risk.

Fall on Jesus. Thank Him for His love for you. The more you realize, "He loves me and nothing in all creation can separate me from His love," the more that sinks in and changes the way you think, then you start realizing, "What do I really have to risk in this life? I mean, if I lose it all, I still have Jesus. I still have life forevermore. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

So why not put it all on the line? Why not go into the darkness and serve those in our world who are most in need of the gospel? Why not, if you know that you're loved by a Savior like this? Let's celebrate the power of His cross together: "Son of God, slain for us—what a love, what a cost. We stand forgiven at the cross." That can be true for you. If you trust in Jesus, when you come before God the King on the day of judgment, He will hold out His royal scepter—His scepter of grace—and say, "Welcome in, My child," fully forgiven, fully free in His presence, because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Son of God, slain for us, we thank You for Your great love, for the price You paid. Bearing all our sin and shame, in love You came and gave us amazing grace. Make that grace more precious, more real, more joyous to us today at this Communion Table. May our communion with You deepen, our love for You increase and our boldness in You grow stronger as a result of having been with You today. We ask in Your name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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