

Men And Women Of The Bible: Mordecai

Esther 4:1-17 ~ October 21, 2020

History—Where Are We?

- The book of Esther takes place about 500 years before Christ, and about 50 years after Ezra had led the Jews back to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon. Mordecai, rather than returning to Jerusalem, stayed in the land of Persia under the reign of a King named Xerxes. He was a pagan king who was also cruel.
- At the end of a special seven-day feast, King Xerxes called for Queen Vashti to come and parade before guests. Vashti refused, Xerxes got mad and sent her away, and then found himself needing a new queen, held a beauty contest, and Esther was chosen as Queen.
- A few chapters before our passage for today, Mordecai discovered a plot to kill King Xerxes and told his cousin Esther, who told the King about Mordecai's findings.

What Had Been Done?

- Haman was an officer of the King, and Xerxes respects him to the extent that he passes a decree that commands all his people to bow down to Haman whenever he passed. But Mordecai was a righteous man, and he wasn't going to bow to anyone other than God.
- This made Haman quite angry. He wanted revenge. Esther 3:6 says: *"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."* Because the King trusted Haman's judgment, the King decreed that all the Jews should indeed be eliminated. Mordecai heard about it and was heartsick.

Today's Story

- Esther heard him crying out, and originally sent someone to give him some clothes so he would take off his sackcloth. But Mordecai refused, and Esther sent someone to find out what was wrong, and her attendant came back and told her of the King's edict.
- Mordecai was clear about what he wanted. He expected Esther to *do* something about this...specifically, go and talk to the King. Because he realized that she was the only one who could do anything about the problem. He said to her, *"Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews...Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."* Then Esther told Mordecai, *"Gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."*

What Can We Learn From Mordecai?

- Often we focus in on the bravery of Esther, since going before the King without being summoned could result in death. And she was a courageous young woman, full of resolve to save her people.
- But we overlook Mordecai's role in all of this—the role of an encourager.
 - Mordecai figuratively shook Esther out of her sunshine-and-roses world and reminded her that this would affect her and that trying to quiet him wasn't going to help.
 - He encouraged her to act, though it would be scary, though it might mean losing her life.
 - His words supported her, gave her confidence, and gave her courage to do what God was calling her to do.
 - In fact, that was his calling—to be a motivator for others. He remained behind the scenes as a coach and cheerleader for Esther.
- This is an important role for us in our Christian faith as well, and one that is easy to overlook. We remember Olympic athletes and movie stars, but rarely remember those who helped them get where they are today. The Bible gives us examples of those who were sent to encourage and an exhortation to encourage each other:
 - Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2)
 - Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13)
 - But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:8-11)

To Ponder:

- What can you catch others doing well?
- How can you encourage them when they may doubt their gifts, or become afraid of doing what God is calling them to do?