

Biography: Esther

Reconnect – June 28, 2009

Series/Morning Intro

- We've been looking at people lately here at Reconnect – personalities of the Bible with something to say to us today through their words, their lives, their faith – or even their lack of it
- Two weeks ago was Jonathan – a true friend, humble and loyal – last week was Jephthah – the worst dad ever, a manipulating smooth operator
- And this week is someone very different again – someone who lived their whole life trying to deny who they were, only to find that it was in her “different-ness” that she would find the answer to her life and death issue
- She was much more than just a pretty face – this week's biography is Esther

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When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: "Everyone who's anyone knows that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai. Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die." So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther 4:1-17, NLT

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Text: Esther 4:1-17; John 16:33

Key Thought: Esther shows us that remembering who we are and whose we are is the key to having the courage to risk living out God's love.

Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?" Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die." So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. (Esther 4:13-17, NLT)

Pre-Intro: Gone, Gone, Gone [video]

Intro: Beauty queens and "scholarship competitions"

- Carrie Prejean story making the news – beauty queens aren't really supposed to speak out for anything other than world peace
- Whatever you thought of what she said, she at least said something that was controversial – but most times it seems that it's image, rather than substance, that comes through pageants like that ("scholarship competitions")

A beauty queen who was more than just a pretty face: Esther

Background (refer to video)

- It's been five years since Esther won the Miss Persia 479BC contest – and during that five years, she has found herself immersed in the "palace life" – gossip, intrigue, image, who is with who, appearances, parties, fashion, days filled with mani-pedis and new hairstyles, celebrity, a search for the "latest thing" and really, boredom – a little bit like the celebrity lifestyle today, perhaps, but without blogs and paparazzi – where's the party going to be tonight?
- And I wonder if in those five years, Esther has managed to convince herself of some things – that she's not really any different from anyone else there, that this is what her life was meant to be, that she's arrived, that she should just enjoy the ride and not make waves
- After all, her cousin Mordecai had raised her to be immersed in Persian rather than Jewish culture – even changing her name to fit in – from Myrtle (prim and proper in any language) to Esther, "star"
- Maybe she's "lost herself" a little bit – she doesn't see Mordecai that much anymore, being that she's in the women's quarters, even though he works in the palace – maybe she's changed, become someone different than the Esther that initially had won Xerxes' heart with how different she was from all the other faces in front of him
- After all, it's been thirty days since the King has requested to see her – that's never happened before – does it mean that she, too, has been replaced? Or that he's grown tired of her?
- And then suddenly, one day, everything that she has built for herself is on the edge of collapsing, when she hears from cousin Mordecai

- Racial tensions have come to the surface – the same sort of racial tension that Mordecai had always hoped to avoid by flying under the radar, by downplaying their heritage – and the fallout is enormous
- Mordecai has offended a wealthy advisor to the king named Haman, by refusing to bow to him, likely because Haman is a descendant of a group that was historically devoted to wiping out the Jews
- Haman, in turn, has discovered Mordecai’s nationality, and has manoeuvred the inept King Xerxes into putting a law on the books that will wipe out the entire Jewish nation within the Persian empire, at a certain date and time only months from now
- The legal structure of the kingdom says that what the King says can’t ever be taken back – and Haman has the money and the influence to now do whatever he wants to do
- The Jews – a people without a homeland, a people in exile, a people struggling to maintain their culture and beliefs in a foreign world – are faced with complete annihilation – and it seems that their only hope is a queen who has lost her way
- She hears the news from Mordecai, and then responds as many of us would – “What can I do about it?” – the King does what he wants, it’s been thirty days, the law can’t be repealed – it’s over no matter what, so why not just do what I’ve always done, and hide?

Read Text: Esther 4:13-17

Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: “Don’t think for a moment that because you’re in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: **“Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die.”** So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

What do you do when you’re confronted with injustice? When someone needs your help?

- Ill. – this week here in Canada, transplant doctors performed the first four-way kidney swap – where willing donors who had been unable to help their own loved ones due to compatibility issues, were able to work together to help each other help others
- What kind of courage is it, to be able to put your life on the line, to sacrifice, out of love for someone else that needs your help
- To have the chance to help a loved one is what these people have been hoping and praying for, in some cases, for years and years – and then suddenly, it’s there – “we have a match”
- Most of the time it’s not quite so dramatic as this – but we have many small opportunities to do the right thing – to speak up at work, or defend a friend, or give towards making a difference, in the middle of our obsessed, shallow world

No-one is an island – we're all in this together

“Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed.

- We can't live our lives as if we're different, or insulated, or even, Jesus help us, better than those around us – because for all our finger-pointing and quiet satisfaction, the day will come when we will need help, too

God's timing and placement is perfect – He controls our circumstances

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”

- God is not mentioned in the book of Esther – but He is all the way through it, holding everything in His hands – all of the reversals, all of the ways that the story goes back and forth with Mordecai being honoured instead of Haman, Haman being hung on the stockade that he built for Mordecai, the Jews being able to defend themselves in a hostile climate, the Jews suddenly becoming so popular that everyone wants to be one

Remember who you are, and whose you are

“Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same.

- Esther has lost sight of some important things in five years – but the crisis brings them back, and she knows that she needs to step up
- She goes back to the basics – fasting and praying (the praying part is understood for any Jewish person reading this) – detox from the lifestyle she's been in, back to basics – she is one of God's people, chosen by Him and loved by Him – and that becomes a foundation for the leap of faith that she takes

Jesus has been there first

And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die.”

- Courage, sacrifice, love – all evidenced in the cross

Key thought:

Esther shows us that remembering who we are and whose we are is the key to having the courage to risk living out God's love.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me.

Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.

But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (Jesus, in John 16:33, NLT)

Conclusion: “I am Neda”

- Fast forward to modern day Persia – Iran, in the middle of the largest and most promising pro-democracy demonstrations in a generation
- So much has changed – but one person can still make a difference
- We saw the video earlier – how a woman named Neda Salehi Agha Soltan and her tragic, senseless murder have become a rallying cry for the protesters
- She believed in the cause, according to what we can find out at this point – but she was just at the wrong place at the wrong time for this to happen – and yet, so much can come out of this
- Her name means “voice”, and she has become the voice needed for people to speak out against the fear and oppression that looms over their everyday lives
- Think about you and I – we’re likely not going to give our lives in a pro-democracy protest – but God has placed us where we are, and it’s up to us to figure out why and go with it
- Whether your name is “voice” or “star” or something much more ordinary, it doesn’t matter, because God is at work in your story – if you and I will have the courage to remember who we are and whose we are, and act accordingly in spreading the love of God

Response: Hope To Carry On [video]