

“God’s Preparation for This Position” Esther 4-6

Series: Rising from the Ruins Week 8

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“Courage! What makes a king out of a slave? Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk, in the misty mist or the dusky dusk? What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder? Courage! What makes the dawn come up like thunder? Courage! What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the "ape" in apricot? What have they got that I ain't got? Courage! You can say that again!” Harold Arlen - Wizard of Oz 1939

Courage. Let’s think about courage. We need it many times in our lives. With courage we need to remember 3 things. There’s opposition, choices needing to be made which come with a price, and prayer to make the right choice.

Let’s look at the Cowardly Lion from the Wizard of Oz. The problem he faces is going before the all powerful Wizard to ask for help. The easy option is to give into his cowardice and not to go to the Wizard, then he doesn’t get the help he needs. Or the right option, which is facing his fear of the Wizard with his friends by his side. But before they can receive the Wizard’s help, they will have to go on a scary mission. Courage was evident throughout the movie. So what is courage? Where do we find it? How do we use it?

This theme also plays out in the Book of Esther. Last week we were introduced to the main characters. The scene is set in Persia, a cultural hot spot and “the place to be!” We meet King Xerxes who’s the current ruler of Persia. And Haman, King Xerxes’ right hand man who only cares about his status. He holds a considerable amount of power within the king’s court, and even gets the king to pass an edict commanding everyone to bow down whenever Haman passes. Then there’s Mordecai; a devout Jew who refuses to bow to Haman. He only bows down to God. Haman is so enraged he persuades the king to issue an edict to annihilate the entire Jewish population.

As we pick up in Esther chapter 4, Persia’s entire Jewish population is in mourning, in agony. The news of the decree is spreading. Jews are tearing their clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and publicly wailing. Jews all over the provinces begin to fast. Their death sentence is inescapable. Even the newly appointed queen, Mordecai’s niece, Esther, is at risk. She just doesn’t know it yet, being sheltered in the king’s palace.

When Esther hears about Mordecai’s agonized state, she’s in great distress. She sends a eunuch to find out what’s wrong. Mordecai fills him in, and sends him back with a copy of the edict, and instructions for Esther to go to the king and plead for mercy on their people. Esther’s people are going to die!

“Then she instructed him [the eunuch] to say to Mordecai, “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”
Esther 4:10-11

Queen Esther knows this risk. The only reason she’s queen is because Queen Vashti before her was exiled for disobeying the king’s orders. If Esther barges in the throne room it will likely mean her death.

“When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?’”
Esther 4:12-14

Wise Mordecai reminds Esther, she’s a Jew even if she hides it. But God put her in this position for a reason—to save her people! Esther faces the easy choice versus the right choice. Will she rise to the challenge and speak up or will she keep quiet and watch her people be massacred?

“Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ‘Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.” Esther 4:15-17

In her time of greatest pressure Esther returns to the roots of her faith. She invites her attendants and the whole Jewish community to fast and pray for 3 days for guidance and wisdom. After the 3 days, Queen Esther will courageously go before King Xerxes to use her position of power to win the king’s favor. But what will she say? What plan is God preparing for her?

Fast forward 3 days, the time to approach the king is here. Queen Esther puts on some of her finest royal robes and braces herself for what’s to come. She bravely walks down to the throne room praying for God’s words to fill her. Esther reaches the doorway and slowly inches into the eyesight of King Xerxes. Queen Esther takes a breath, this is the moment of truth. How will King Xerxes respond? Just a simple tilt of his golden scepter guarantees safety for the moment; however, in a fit of rage he got rid of the previous queen... will it happen again? Time stands still but finally the king tips the scepter towards Esther. With a sigh of relief she hears the invitation to approach the throne.

Esther is born for such a time as this. God placed her under Mordecai’s care when she was orphaned, and brought up in the Jewish faith. Queen Vashti was removed to give Esther the role of queen so she would be in a position to save her people. It’s her faith in God which gives her courage.

Back to our story, King Xerxes asks what Queen Esther desires, anything up to half of the kingdom. Queen Esther states she wants to invite Haman and the king to a banquet the following evening. Then she will tell the king what she desires. The king agrees and he and Haman enjoy a luxurious banquet. When the king asks Queen Esther what she desires at the end of the evening she asks for them to rejoin her the following night. Esther’s plan is set in motion.

Esther rose to the challenge when courage was needed. Now the tables turn to us. Today, I want us to evaluate how we respond to tough situations and maybe do some repositioning with God’s help. When do we need courage? Where do we find it? How do we use it?

We need courage when we come up against opposition or a problem. This tension leads us to decisions we must make. We have multiple options when facing a problem. It comes down to: the right versus the easy option. Remember both come with a price. In Esther’s situation the easy choice was to remain silent, and the price was her people being massacred. Though it seemed to be the easier choice, it also came with a false belief she would be safe. The right and harder choice was risking her own life to speak up for her people. Instead of saving her own skin, she had courage to do the right thing.

What has been a situation in your life where you came to a crossroads between the easy choice and the right choice? How did you come to make the right choice? You needed courage to make the

decision. Where do we find our courage in the midst of those places? When faced with a difficult situation, do you ever feel the crushing weight of hopelessness? We often feel hopeless because we're relying on our own strength to overcome huge obstacles. I've been there many times. I think I have to produce the courage and strength on my own. By placing so much pressure on myself, I start to doubt every decision. I want to invite you into this learning journey with me. Courage is NOT something we can conjure on our own power. Courage is something which is unleashed in us through the power of Holy Spirit. He gives us the strength to face these obstacles. This is when we enter a time, like Esther, of prayer and fasting to allow Holy Spirit to unleash His courage into us.

It has nothing to do with our abilities. What it does have to do with is our identity. Our one true identity as children of God. God wants to take care of us more than we can imagine because He loves His kids! In order for Esther to show her courage, she had to remember to use her true identity from a place of power. So when a crisis comes - what do we do? In our distress, we must remember to go back to the foundation of our faith. God wants to be our foundation. He wants to be the One who plants courage within us to do what He's called us to do. He wants to guide us.

We've addressed the need for courage and where we find it. Now, how do we use it? Where is God asking us to use our courage? How do we recognize when God's calling us to act? Think for a moment. Where has God placed you in this season? Who are the people and issues you feel called to advocate for? Get equipped! Take the GPS assessment if you haven't yet uncovered your Gifts, Passions and Story! These are all part of your unique identity as a child of God! God placed them in YOU! We are each called to play an important role in His plan. God wants you to speak up for those people and causes. So wherever you feel short or lacking, allow Holy Spirit to equip you. Demonstrate the courage to show up where you've been placed. If God calls us to something, He gives us the strength and courage to accomplish our purpose.

In Esther 4:14 Mordecai's passing the baton to Esther. When we are dealt a problem, we need to remember this! We have what it takes because of WHO we are in Christ and WHERE we've been placed. Say to yourself, "I have what it takes because of who I am and where I've been placed by God." This is God's preparation for this position.

I went through this process in September of 2018. I started a job teaching 6th graders at a charter school in Philadelphia. I was well equipped for the position and I was excited to bring God's love to these students. Although I felt God led me to this job, the job ended up being one of the worst experiences I've ever been in. I left feeling defeated and heartbroken almost daily. It was sucking the soul out of me. Fast forward to the end of January/early February of 2019. Each of the staff received an email asking us to confirm whether we'd be returning for the following school year or not. I was faced with a decision. Easy option - stay. I had an income, health insurance, and job security. Yes it was terrible but it was safe! And, the right option—to leave such a toxic environment. I needed courage to risk being able to afford my apartment. I was risking having no health insurance so if something happened to me I was unprotected. Yet despite all of these risks, I knew God had something more planned for me. After much prayer, many conversations, and countless hours waiting for God to reveal His plan, He did. A week after I ended my teaching career, I became your Director of Discipleship here at Woodside. It's been the most rewarding job I've ever had. I get to know so many of you, hear your stories, and see how God's working in your lives. All of my passions and skills are being utilized and Holy Spirit equips me for new things all the time! It all happened as a result of a willingness to embrace the position God placed me in. Looking back, I see all of His preparation to make it possible.

Let's remember God's preparation for the position we are in the next time we need courage.