

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Leadership

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Scripture: Esther 4:12-16

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai,

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

¹⁶ "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."

Transcript:

Wanted to just start by reading our scripture today. It's from the book of Esther, chapter 4. "When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer, 'Do not think because you are in the king's house, that 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 a royal position for such a time as this.' 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, and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, and though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish,'" so will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we want to thank You for this scripture, and Holy Spirit, would You take this time? Would You help us to hear Your word? Would You make us different people in this time, and we pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen. Well, welcome everybody.

It is great to be with you. It's so fun to be back in person again. It's just, we're still not quite fully all present, but so great to be with you, and I especially, I want to welcome those of you who are worshiping with us online. Thanks for joining us today. A special shout out to students.

Any students in the room today? All right, nice. You were missing in the sanctuary service. You let me down. I put the shout out there, and you know what I heard? Crickets, nothing.

How many were at VBA last week? There are a couple, a fewer ... All right. Well, anyway, great to be with you guys today. My name is Rich Leatherberry. I'm one of the mission pastors

here, and we are going through this sermon series that we are calling Lead, about how all of us are leaders, and leadership is just another name for influence, another word for influence. God uniquely prepares our lives for something that only we can do for such a time as this. God is accomplishing His greater purposes for the world, for your neighborhood through you, because you influence others. You're a leader. You're a leader. This book of Esther, it's a really quick read.

I encourage you to read through it sometime after the sermon, kind of after we're done here today, but read through the whole of the book because it's a great story. It has lots of twists and surprises, has good leaders, has bad leaders in it. There's just a lot going on. I want to summarize this story a little bit because it helps us to understand kind of the fuller picture of what's going on. Now, King Xerxes, he throws this six-month party.

That's a long one, and everyone in the empire is invited. They're all ... Everyone gets to come, and on one of the last days of this party, the king asked his wife, Queen Vashti, to appear in front of a room of his drunken friends to sort of strut her beauty in front of them. Surprisingly, she refuses, refuses to be as eye candy, and in sort of this fit of rage, he immediately removes the crown from her and throws her out of the kingdom. This leaves him queenless, so his advisors, they counsel him and coach him to start a nationwide search for the virgin woman that would please him the most and who would become the new queen.

The most beautiful young women in the whole of the empire are taken from their homes and brought to this palace where they received beauty treatments and prepared for the night when the king will summon them to his bedroom. Then, afterwards, they will live the rest of their lives as nothing more than sort of these glorified mistresses of the king. It's dark. It is so, so bad. So bad, and I share that with you because I want you to understand this setting that God is working, and then God can even work in the darkest of situations.

Now, the most ... Esther is this young Jewish woman that the king selects, and her rise to royalty is rivaled by this man, Haman, who becomes a second-in-command next to the king, and Haman, though uses his power to launch this genocidal plot to exterminate the Jewish people. Queen Esther's uncle, Mordecai raised Esther after both of her parents died, and he continues to influence her as she prepares to be queen. At his insistence, she keeps her Jewish identity secret. Nobody knows that she's a Jew, but when the king signs into law, this edict, announcing the date for the genocide, well, Mordecai appeals to Esther to save them, and in the verses that we read, it's the turning point for the whole of the story.

It's in these verses that Esther suddenly realizes that she has been uniquely positioned for such a time as this to rescue her people, so what she does is she tells Mordecai to fast for three days, and she tells Mordecai to tell all the Jews to fast for three days. Then, after three days, she appears before the king, reveals to him her Jewish identity, and through her influence over the king, is able to foil Haman's plot. Haman is put to death as a traitor, and the king signs into law, this edict, that ultimately saves the Jews from extermination. That's some pretty courageous leadership in this story from Esther, right? I want to spend some time today looking at Esther's leadership. I want to look at the kind of leadership that Esther showed, because it's the kind of leadership that really helps other people experience God's love and God's goodness.

It's the kind of leadership where leaders are actually servants. It's the kind of leadership where the Holy Spirit is where people rely on Him to equip us for leadership, and I call that kingdom

leadership, and as kingdom leaders, we get to represent the King of kings, Jesus Christ. Whenever and wherever we lead, our influence over others points to Jesus and helps them experience His life, His love, His way. We get to serve and care for people, and speak and act in ways that show them what life in His kingdom is really like. God has uniquely prepared us for something that only we can do for such a time as this.

God is using you to accomplish His greater purposes in the world, in your neighborhood for such a time as this, and that really means two things. First, it means God has chosen you. Think about that for a moment. God chooses you. Of all the times in history when, to be alive, God made you for this time.

Like God didn't make you for a previous century, and you didn't show up earlier than God expected. Like God meant for you to be here right now, and all the experiences that you've had, the personality that is uniquely you, that your strengths and your weaknesses, God uses all that to prepare you for the assignment that He has for you. God wants to use you. Not me, not someone else, not the person sitting next to you, as highly capable as they may look at this moment, God picks you, and here's the thing. If you are still breathing, God is not done with you yet.

You have been uniquely prepared for something that only you can do for such a time as this, and that also means that God qualifies you for your assignment. For some of you who are listening to this series on leadership, you might be thinking, "That's great, Pastor. Great, good ... None of that stuff really applies to me because I'm no Esther." Well, God doesn't need you to be queen.

He just needs you to be you, to be who you are, right where you are. Maybe you think you're too old or too young, too inexperienced or in way over your head. That's great. Awesome. You're in good company, because Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Ruth, David, Mary, that's their story.

God didn't choose them because of their ability. God chose and called them because of their availability, because they had a heart for God and a willingness to serve others, and it was when they said yes to that call. When they said, "Yup, I'm in," that's when God provided what they needed. I visited a friend of mine in the hospital after he'd had surgery a couple years ago, and his wife and his family were there. We were talking, and then we were just about ready to pray for my friend for his recovery and all, and just as we were there in that spot, the nurse walked in.

My friend's wife spoke to the nurse, said, "We're about ready to pray, and we would love to pray for you. Is there anything that we can pray for you about?" Well, the nurse kind of hesitated, and then she slowly started to share her story. She had had a late-term miscarriage recently. Her husband wasn't there because he was out of the country on a mission overseas, unable to attend.

She was alone. She had no friends, no family in the area, depressed, not knowing what to do, so we prayed for her, right there, right in that spot. Almost immediately, this huge burden was visibly lifted from her. I mean, you could just see it. You could even feel it in the room, and when we started that prayer, she was in tears, but when we were done, man, she was all smiles.

She was so filled with joy. She ... This prayer just changed everything for her, and she was like, "You know, I'm just about giving up on God, but you guys, this prayer, it has given me

hope." That's influence. My friend's wife was being a leader in that moment. Now, she hadn't taken a class on how to pray for a nurse, right?

She didn't have a certification as a hospital chaplain, she just simply had a heart for God and a willingness to serve, and then she let God take care of the rest. Now, just before the passage that we read, Mordecai learns about this extermination order, so he dresses himself in sackcloth, which is, man, it's about as bad and uncomfortable as that sounds, sackcloth. Then, he throws ashes all over himself as a sign of his mourning, and he walks around the city, crying and weeping and carrying on. Well, when Esther heard about Mordecai, her first reaction, her first reaction is to send him a box of new clothes like, "Clean yourself up, Mordecai. You're embarrassing yourself," you know?

That is often our first reaction, it's often easier just to deny the problem, kind of clean it up, put new clothes on it, rather than deal with it directly. That's Esther's first reaction in this, but then Mordecai actually refuses the clothes, and then he goes on to tell her what's actually going on, what has happened, and he challenges her to use her position as queen to help them. "Who knows?," he says, "But that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this." Now, the rest of the story is how Esther rose to the challenge as a leader, and there's a lot that we can learn about Esther's leadership. I want to just focus on three things quickly about her leadership.

Three characteristics, and the first one is this, the kingdom leaders know what time it is. We know what time it is. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There's a time for everything and a season for everything under the sun." Time changes and times change. Time changes us, and there were so many changes in Esther's life, right, living as a young girl in Mordecai's house, and then growing a little older, and suddenly being swept off to the palace, and now, suddenly she finds herself in this place where she needs to understand the significance of this royal position that she is in, and the influence that she can have to save her people.

We all have to ask ourselves, "What time is it? What season of life am I in?" Are you a student, an employer, an employee, retired, a parent? Who is under your influence for such a time as this? Now, a woman on our staff recently told us, said she was in a mother's Bible study that is focused on helping each other excel in their calling as moms, and they talk honestly with each other about the challenges they face as mothers.

They support one another, encourage one another, read scripture together, pray with one another. They are using their position as mothers to influence their kids, and that's what God has called them to do. Like their kids are their mission, so they're helping each other, and they are helping each other point to the King of kings. They're influencing this next generation to love what God loves. God's assignment for you is sometimes, in fact, many times just right there in front of you.

It's the people around you, the relationships you have, the circumstances you're in. God's assignment is often right there in front of you. That brings me to the second characteristic, the kingdom leaders move in faith and courage. See, fear limits our ability to respond to God's call, fear of failure, fear of inadequacy, fear of losing control. For Esther, that meant fear of losing her life. She could literally ...

The king could literally put her to death immediately for appearing in his throne room without his previous invitation. I know about fear. Maybe you know something about fear too. Faith and courage are not the absence of fear, but they are the presence of action in the face of fear. We

still feel the fear. I still feel the fear. You still feel the fear, but faith and courage, it moves us through the fear to action.

It's Esther approaching the king. It's David facing off Goliath. It's you and me grabbing hold of our roles as kingdom leaders and trusting God to use us to influence others. It's having the faith to believe that with God, that's possible, because faith is believing that with God, all things are possible, that there's no problem God cannot solve, no life He cannot revive, no obstacle He cannot overcome, no injustice He cannot work through, no brokenness He cannot heal, no stage of life that He cannot work with. God can take a stuttering fugitive named Moses, and use him to destroy the strongest dictator in the world at that time. God can take a young shepherd named David and use him to flatten the fiercest soldier of the enemy's army.

God can take a young woman named Esther, raise her up to queen and use her to foil the enemy's plot to assassinate God's chosen people. God can take the darkest, cruelest instrument in this world and use the cross to win our victory over sin and over death, because with God, all things are possible. You see, faith, faith is not the confidence that God will do what I want Him to do. Faith is the conviction that we can do what God wants done for Him, and then He'll take care of the consequences to that. Faith and courage are always, always demonstrated in this context of fear and hesitation, otherwise who needs faith, who needs courage, right?

That brings me to the third characteristic, kingdom leaders are mentors and they're mentored. Esther courageously uses her position as queen and cleverly reveals Haman as the traitor that he is, and then saves the Jews, but Mordecai's place in this story is just as significant. It's equally important, because it's Mordecai that raises the orphan, Esther. It's Mordecai that continues to influence her on her rise to queenship. It's Mordecai that intercedes for the Jews when he hears about this genocidal edict, and then he challenges Esther as her most trusted advisor.

Mordecai's strong faith, mentoring and leadership, that's what helps Esther become the leader that she needs to be in order to save her people. Now, you and I, we need mentors. We need spiritual mentors and coaches, people who will speak into our lives, people who will ask the hard questions when we're facing decisions, people who'll guide us and be there for us. Now, it's hard to reach out to people sometimes, right? It takes a lot of humility to ask for help, but we need those mentors in our life, and we need to mentor others.

Parents are the greatest influence in their children's lives, and another key factor in a child's sustaining faith into adulthood is connection with an adult, like many of us here in this room, who can be and are acting as a spiritual mentor in those kids' lives. When the time was right, Esther, with Mordecai's help, he was propping her up. She had the courage to implement the plan, save the Jews. Now, it's interesting to me that the book of Esther surprisingly never mentions God's name. Like God doesn't even get a shout out in this book, as being the One that's acting and causing things or working through the events in the story.

It's only the people are the active players. They're the only ones in the spotlight. God's not in the spotlight, and I think the author does that, because in part, because there are times when God just seems like He's not there, right, when God just seems like He's missing from your life, or maybe God feels like He's just doing nothing. Like, "What are you doing, God?" "Nothing."

"I know it, nothing," but that one of the truths that this book of Esther is showing us, that it's exactly at those times when we feel like God is missing. It's exactly at those times that God is

working His best. He's accomplishing His best because God is the invisible Actor behind it all. He's working behind the scenes. He's not listed in the credits, often not recognized for what He's done, but He's the One that's working out the details.

He's the One that's fitting together the pieces of our lives, the puzzle that is our lives. He's putting it all together, and I think the story of Esther is telling us, that is when God feels like He's missing, it's exactly then that we need to lean on Him most, trust Him more. Trust Him more. When you can't see His hand at work in your life or in the circumstances around you, you know you can trust His heart. This week, will you ask God to show you your Esther moment like, "God ..."

Pray that. "God, what's my Esther moment?" Like, what season are you in? Who can you influence? How has God uniquely positioned you for that, because you see, wherever you are, whatever stage of life that you are in, you are never too old or too young, too busy or too sick, too broken or too burned out for God to use you to influence others. From the moment that you were born to the moment someone else lays you in the ground, God has a plan and a purpose for your life.

He has an assignment for you. You influence others always because you are a leader. Jesus, would You show us our Esther moments? Would You give us, Lord, show us who we can influence? Show us, Lord, and would You reveal to us the unique positions that we are in as Your followers, and Lord, help us to be part of what You're doing in our community and in our world?

Jesus, we need You and we love You. You are the King of kings, Lord of lords, and we just want to point people to You, so we pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read Esther 4:12-16 and answer the below questions with your friends, family or All In small group.

Ice Breaker Question:

- Are you a listener or a talker?

Opening Questions:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following

- Have you ever been mentored by someone? If so, what was that like?

- How can you use the roles or positions you are in to help others experience the goodness and love of Jesus?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.