

Return

THE YEAR OF THE BIBLE

Esther: Queen of Courage

Esther 1-10

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- July 12, 2020

Well, good morning, Grace. You know, when I think about times like this, I think I wish I just knew what God was doing, like obviously doing. And I would love to know what exactly I'm supposed to do about that. How do I follow God's will in times like these, for such a time as this? You might be feeling this as well.

When you look at the Book of Exodus and that whole epic and you see those graphic and marvelous miracles like the cloud, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire--I want that, where you just wake up in the morning and that's God's will for your life and you say, *I'll follow You anywhere. You're going to keep me safe.* Yeah, I know there's that story where that pillar leads them right to a dead end in the Red Sea and there's an angry Egyptian army right behind them. But besides that part of it ... Anyway, the clarity of God making himself obvious, it seems like it'd be an easier way to live.

Introduction to the Book of Esther

It's not so much, though. God's working right now. He's just working quietly in such a time as this. And because that's the way God works, He has given us this amazing book in the Bible. It's called Esther. It's a wonderful, marvelous story and it helps us learn how to live a life and find out how God works when He's quiet, in a time like this—the Book of Esther.

The context of it—we're reading through the Bible together as a church and we're trying to figure out the bigger purpose and the bigger picture that God has painted for all creation. Esther finds its way after the United Kingdom, the Divided Kingdom, and then their exile for seventy years. Israel is in Babylon. Babylonia is captured and defeated by the Persians. And the Persians are allowing Israel to return. So, this is the return of the exile period. And now one of

the capital cities of Persia is a city called Susa, and that's where the Book of Esther picks up, in that capital city.

And personally, the Book of Esther is one of my top three favorite books in the Bible, because it does explain and show how God works in times like this, when He's somewhat quiet; and how we can live and what to look for. I think the Book of Esther is God's favorite plot line, really.

Let me tell you the overall story today. I don't have time to go into too much detail, so I'll survey the story. Please read it this week. It's an easy read.

Four Major Characters

There are four major characters. Let me introduce them. I'll give you a character and a nickname.

1. King Xerxes: Volatile Sociopath

The first one King Xerxes. He's a volatile sociopath. He is the King of Persia. He rules the world, uncontested. And the amount of anger and violence that can come from this man is unimaginable. You never make Xerxes angry. His sister-in-law—his brother's wife—he had affection for her. And he made an advance on her and she rebuffed that advance, and so, Xerxes was angry, and so he murdered his brother and slaughtered that whole family. You don't make Xerxes angry. He was able to do that and still make it back for the wine-tastings—always tasting wine.

The idea here is this. The vultures grow too fat to fly in the kingdom where Xerxes rules. That's King Xerxes.

2. Esther: Innocent Orphan

The next character is Esther. She is an innocent orphan. She has lost her parents and she has the potential of becoming the heroine in this story, but if and only if she has a radical change in character.

3. Mordecai: Shrewd Jew

The next person you need to know is Mordecai. Mordecai—his nickname is the shrewd Jew—is the uncle of Esther, the innocent orphan, and he adopts Esther to be his own. And he raises this young lady from an innocent child all the way up to her teen years as his own daughter.

Act I: The Crazy King Needs a Queen

And as the story begins, it starts with the king, the crazy king, needing a queen. Act I opens like this. The previous queen made King Xerxes angry, and so she's gone. And so, the entire 127 provinces are out looking for a new queen for King Xerxes. And so, what's happening is that the soldiers are going into each one of these little villages and pulling every beautiful virgin out from those families and away from them, anywhere from fourteen to maybe twenty years old. And they're bringing them to Susa to, quote, audition for the king.

Here's what it looks like for them. They're going to spend a year getting prepped and ready to have one night with crazy King Xerxes. And if he says no, they'll be taken off and brought to his harem where they will live the rest of their lives with the other "no's" and never see their families again. If the king were to say yes—I'm not sure that's a good thing, but if he says yes and you, quote, win, you are now queen of Persia, but you are queen to this volatile, sociopath King Xerxes.

As the story goes, Esther is ripped from the arms of her uncle/godfather Mordecai. And she is naïve to what is coming her way, but Mordecai is not. And so, he tells her these two things. He says, "These are the laws that you have to live by. This is how you survive, Esther. Don't tell anyone you're a Jew. And do not make King Xerxes angry." That's how it goes.

Esther does what she is told. That's what she does. And she is taken to the palace. And when she goes there, the head eunuch finds favor with her. She's just really lucky. And he likes her a lot. He makes sure that she's going to be attended to by his best people. And then Esther's night comes. And she doesn't know what to do or how to act, and so, she appeals to that head eunuch who's in charge, who likes her a whole lot. And he tells her what to do and how to act

and what to bring to that event. And Esther does what she's told, because that's what Esther does well. She does what she's told.

And guess what? I guess she's lucky, because she gets picked by crazy King Xerxes to be the queen. And this is not like a Cinderella story, because this king is no Prince Charming. She will be living her life in abject fear because of the two rules: don't tell him that you're a Jew, and do not make King Xerxes angry.

4. Haman the Agagite: Jew Killer

Those are our three characters. That's what gets us to the first couple of scenes here. Now we meet Haman. And Xerxes is not the villain in this story, believe it or not. Haman is, Haman the Agagite. That means "the Jew killer." Haman is from a family line that goes back a thousand years who have had this ambition: to kill every Jew. Since the birth of Israel, when they were coming out of Egypt, brand new Israel as a nation, the Agagites, or the Amalekites—it's a nickname—tried to extinguish Israel when they were very young. And they've been working on it ever since. He's the Jew killer. He hopes for genocide, Haman. And here's what's bad: he is second in command in all of Persia. There's only one person above in all of Persia, and that's King Xerxes. And Xerxes orders that every time Haman is walking through any kind of village or the city, everyone else must bow down and pay him honor. Pay Haman honor, Haman, the Jew killer.

But here's the thing. Mordecai, the queen's uncle, won't bow down to Haman. The story goes like this: Day after day, Mordecai, the shrewd Jew, will not bow down to Haman, the Jew killer. And you've got to keep in mind that this is the ancient Near East where honor is life. Honor is more valuable than gold. And losing face, the opposite of that, in front of other people is a crime against a person's ego. And so, when Haman the Jew killer sees that one man, a Jewish man, is not bowing down, he snaps. He is enraged with this loss of face, this affront to his ego. And so, he takes the king's signet ring and writes a decree to kill, not Mordecai, but all the Jews.

Esther 3:13

Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with this order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children.

Here's what he writes: "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children." Destroy, kill, annihilate—all of that to everyone. And then the date of this death and destruction is determined by a lottery, rolling the dice, chance, fate. They look into the stars and they choose the date of death, and it will be eleven months from now. And that's how the scene ends, with Haman the Jew killer and Xerxes the king on the upper deck of the palace drinking wine. And the last sentence of this chapter says, "And the king and Haman sat down for a drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered."

The Choice

Scene four, chapter 4. It's a play, it's a movie. It is a great story. Chapter 4, Scene 4 opens up and Mordecai realizes that the only way the Jews are going to be able to survive is if he gets Queen Esther to go and ask the king if he could write another decree that would allow Jews to be able to defend themselves against this destruction and killing and annihilation. And he sends the queen a note that says, *You need to go to the king.*

And the queen responds, *Hey, uncle, you remember the two rules? The last time I saw your face as they were tearing me away from you, you said two rules: don't tell them you're Jewish and don't make Xerxes angry. What about those rules? I can't do this. Here's the thing. If you go to the king uninvited, he'll kill you. I haven't seen him in a month, so I can't do this. The only way I could survive, if I were lucky, would be that he would point his gold scepter towards me. And I could run and touch it. But I can't do this.*

And Mordecai responds like this. He says this. This is tough love. This is a father speaking to a daughter. He says, *You're not going to survive this, Esther.*

Esther 4:12-13

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."

It says, "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.'" And then he says this: the Jews are going to be saved somehow.

Esther 4:14a

We will get help from somewhere else but you and your family will die. 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.

"We will get help from somewhere else but you and your family will die. 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."

Esther 4:14b

And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?

Mordecai is saying this with great confidence because he knows the providential will of God. He knows the providential will of God is to work through the promises of Abraham to bring the kingdom of God to all nations. And no Haman or Hitler can stop that from happening. And so, those things are certain. This is the only choice you have. This is his third point, and that is *a sense of destiny, Esther. Seize the day; for such a time as this*. And so, he says this: "And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?"

Application #1: There Is Something Much Bigger

Boom. There's our application for how to live in such a time as this. Look, this is for all the people. This is for all the people that are believers in YHWH. The first thing is that there's

something much bigger going on around us. We don't have to understand it, we don't have to know it completely. But YHWH is about bringing His kingdom to all nations. And that's why, by the way, we're studying the Bible together as a church. We're spending a whole year trying to figure out that big picture. If you haven't started with us, you can start now. You can start reading along with us. Go on the website and figure out where we are or start at the beginning and hurry up. Go back in the archives starting in January 2020. Remember that? Boy, those were the good old days. Just start listening to the sermons and catch up with us. Help your soul learn the bigger picture of what God is up to.

Application #2: Play Your Part

And then, two, play your part. Play your part in God's bigger picture. Think through this. God has made you and me very special and very unique and then put us here, wherever here is, now—right now—for such a time as this. There needs to be a sense of destiny in the life of every believer, that realizes that God uniquely placed them here. In the New Testament it says that God foreordained—planned ahead before the beginning of time—for you to do good works in Jesus Christ. God is up to something so much bigger, and we need to play our part. That's what's happening in this book.

Esther's First Order

So, Esther hears this back from her godfather and just like that, she is born again, born from above. This is not the girl we were introduced to in the first chapter.

Esther 4:15-17

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 maids 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.” ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Look what she says: “Then Esther sent a reply to Mordecai: ‘God, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go before the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.’” And then look what happens. “So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.”

Look who’s in charge now. Look who’s doing what they’re told. Queen Esther is in charge. And who does what they’re told? Everyone else in this story. I want you to see this story as a radical transformation of what happens when a person steps into the destiny that God has brought to them. Esther begins this story; the whole point of the introduction to this is that she’s very passive. She’s just trying to survive. She’s just trying to stay safe. Go along, get along—that’s her motto. And now she’s barking out orders here and saying, *You know, I’m going to do this, you do that, and if I perish, I perish.* She’s not living for safety anymore. She wants to be part of God’s plan, whatever it costs.

Are you tired of being safe? Are you tired of just going along to get along? Here’s the thing. You cannot change how you got here. But you can change what you do with it. You cannot change maybe the suffering or the injustice or the circumstances of life that brought you here. But you can change what it does to you. That’s the choice we have. And Esther—the story begins with her being a kitten—and now she is a roaring lioness on the hunt. She will hunt quietly.

The plotlines for the future of this story go like this. Esther will be courageous and die at the feet of a crazy king. She made him angry.

Or, two: Esther will be courageous and will go before that crazy king and he will extend that gold scepter. So, Esther, you feeling lucky? Are you feeling lucky? End of Scene 4.

Esther Approaches the King

Scene 5. It says that Esther put on her royal robes. If you can imagine, if it’s like Rambo it’s all this stuff; but she’s dressing to kill. She’s wearing her heels. She dresses up because she’s going to go before the king. It’s after the fasting. Here comes the new Esther.

And it says in the passage, “And she stood before the entrance of the king’s palace in the king’s hallway.” Meanwhile it says, “The king was sitting on his royal throne looking toward the

entrance.” And he sees her and she sees him. And then he extends that golden scepter. I’ll just read it.

“Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.” *Oh yeah. I’m free, I’m safe.* Because he saw her and was fond of that. It says, “Then the king said, ‘What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given to you.’”

“ ‘If it pleases the king,’ Esther says, ‘let the king, together with Haman the Jew killer join me later today for a banquet that I have prepared for them.’”

Esther 5:5

“Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.”

Look what the next verse says. The king said, “Bring Haman at once, so that we may do what Esther asks.” They’re doing what they’re told and who’s telling them what to do? The new Queen Esther. That’s what the king is doing. *Get me Haman.*

The First Banquet

And picture this, will you? Picture this, this banquet. This is the two most powerful men in the entire world and they are eating out, literally, of the palm of Queen Esther’s hands. And do you know why? Because Esther said so. They’re doing what they’re told. And they’re drinking the wine and they’re getting rather lathered up and the king says to the queen, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be done for you. What is your request? I’ll give you half of my kingdom.”

And Esther says, “If I have found favor in you, my king, I would like to ...” Something happens in this story where Esther is hearing that maybe this is not the time. And so, she says, “I would like for you and Haman to come back tomorrow and have another banquet because I feel like we just need another day, another twenty-four hours.”

And here’s what’s happened. This book is so quiet about how God moves that His name is literally never mentioned. But you can see Him working. When a nation fasts and prays and a

queen has a humble heart to hear, God speaks and He is heard. And God says, *Give me twenty-four hours.*

You know there's a famous song that says, "What a difference a day makes, the difference is you." Yeah, that's the story. What a difference a day makes and the difference is YHWH.

The 24 Hours between Banquets

Twenty-four hours and the timer is going from the time that Haman leaves the banquet. He is hopping and skipping home because it's all about honor. It's the ancient Near East and he just had a private dinner with the king and queen and he is the most honorable man in the kingdom. And he's walking home and everyone is bowing down in front of him, except for that one guy. He sees Mordecai, the shrewd Jew, still standing. And he is enraged by that and realizes he can't wait eleven months to kill this man. And so, he resolves that day, *I'm going to kill Mordecai tomorrow.*

And he builds that night a seventy-five-foot gallows—it means an impaling rod. It means a rod, in front of Haman's own house. He builds a seventy-five-foot impaling rod and he's going to stick Mordecai on top of that tomorrow. And as he's building that he's finally resolving and coming to peace, because he's written his to-do list for tomorrow. *I'm going to wake up tomorrow morning, get permission from crazy King Xerxes to kill Mordecai the shrewd Jew. Two, go to the banquet with the king and queen.* He could put his head on the pillow that night and sleep soundly, because he's thought of everything. It's going to be a good day tomorrow. End of scene.

Scene 6. Meanwhile, back at the palace, crazy King Xerxes, the volatile sociopath, is having trouble sleeping. It's 4:30 in the morning and something is keeping him awake. It's like someone won't let him go to sleep. And so, he calls in the servants and says, "Bring me the chronicles of the history of great King Xerxes and just read to me." You're not going to believe this, but it's in the story. It's true. They open up the chronicles of Xerxes and it's just kind of luck, but here's what happens. They open to the page that tells the story of Mordecai the Jew overhearing palace guards conspiring to kill Xerxes. This had happened years before. Mordecai tells Queen Esther about this murder plot, Esther tells the king, the king finds out it's true, and both of those men are hung by the gallows. And he's realizing, *Well, what happened to*

Mordecai, the man? Mordecai saved the life of the man who stole his daughter. Do you see that? Mordecai saved the life of the man who stole Queen Esther from him. Anyway, he's a godly man.

So, King Xerxes says, "I can't wait to hear. What honor was paid to this Mordecai fellow?"

And they keep reading and they say, "Well, nothing. Nothing was given to him."

And the king realizes, "I must rectify this right now. The sun's coming up." He needs help. "How do I give honor, how does the king give honor to such a man as this?"

And as the sun's coming up, there's Haman, getting up in the morning, looking at his to-do list. *One, I'm going to go by King Xerxes's and get permission to kill Mordecai the Jew. Two, I'm going to go to a banquet with the king and the queen. It will be a great day.*

Turns out, we actually have a carving of Haman on his way to the king. Here's what it looks like. Yeah, it looked a lot like that. *It's a great day.*

Esther 6:6

When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"

He walks into the throne room while the king is asking the question, "How do I give honor to a man like this?" And Haman, when he entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for a man the king delights to honor?"

Haman the Jew killer is thinking, *Well, it has to be me ... and so, this is my Christmas list.* And he says this—I'm going to read it because you're not going to believe it. "So he answers, 'For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe that the king has actually worn and a horse that the king has actually ridden, the one with the royal medallion on its forehead, yeah, that one. Let him robe that man with the king's robe and then have them mount that horse and have him be paraded through the entire the city. And whoever's doing that, they need to be chanting this as loud as possible: "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.'"" Out of his own mouth that's his idea.

Esther 6:10

“Go at once,” the king commanded Haman. “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.”

And this is what the king says: “ ‘Go at once,’ the king commanded Haman. ‘Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything that you have recommended.’” That you have recommended.

So, Haman the Jew killer goes to Mordecai the shrewd Jew and puts the king’s robe that he has worn around him and puts him on the king’s horse that the king has ridden, the one with the medallion right there on the forehead, and takes him through all of Susa, saying as loud as he can, “And this is what is done for the man the king delights to honor.”

Hey, Haman how’s that little to-do list going for you so far? Not so good. What a difference a day makes, and the difference is YHWH.

They drop Mordecai off at the front gate. Haman goes home to change because he’s pretty lathered up after this long parade.

Esther 6:13

And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

And he’s telling everybody what’s going on and how it came to transpire. And this what everyone at his house and his wife say. “And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.’”

Boom. End of scene. Curtain closes.

The Second Banquet

Next scene, Scene 7, the second banquet.

Someone grabs Haman and rushes him off to the banquet and there they are drinking a lot of wine again. That's what Xerxes does. And then, he says the words, "Oh, Queen Esther, what is your petition? It's going to be done. What is your request? I'll give you half the kingdom."

Pause.

And Esther says, "Oh king, if I have found favor in your eyes, this is my petition, that you would save my life; that you would save the life of my people. That is my request."

And the king said, "Well, who would want to kill you and all your people?"

And Queen Esther turns and points to Haman the Jew killer and says, "This enemy, this vile Haman."

Haman spits out his wine and says, "What, you're Jewish?"

And the king is so angry that he stands up and runs out of the room. And it says this, that he left his wine behind him. That's the only time he's not had wine. He leaves his wine behind. That's how impassioned and angry he is.

Now Haman, realizing that his life is all but gone, goes and falls before the queen. So, Haman goes down and is on his knees before Queen Esther. I want you to see the bigger picture here, or see what's going on. Haman the Agagite, the Jew killer, is on his knees before a woman, a Jewish woman, begging for his life. How's that checklist coming?

Esther 7:8

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

And then in verse 8 it says, "Just as the king returned from the palace garden and the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining." There it is. And when the king comes back, Haman is touching the queen. And he says, "So, you're going to molest my queen in my house?"

And then one of the waiters comes over to Xerxes and says, “Hey, Haman built a seventy-five-foot impalement rod, a gallow, right in front of his house, to kill Mordecai, the shrewd Jew who saved your life.”

And Xerxes says, “Got it. Have him impaled on that same pole.” And he did. End of scene.

Is this a great story? I told you it’s a great story.

Mordecai’s Promotion / Second Decree

Scene 8 opens up and guess what? Mordecai has now taken over Haman’s house, his castle, his acreage. He has taken over Haman’s job. He is now wearing the king’s signet ring. And what does he do with that? He writes a decree that the king approves of and it’s this. It says that all the Jews now have the right to assemble and protect themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate any enemy of the Jews. And they did. They routed their enemies. It was a huge conquest on the Jewish side.

Esther 8:15-17

Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. ¹⁶ For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

And listen, this is how the story ends in many respects. Chapter 8 says this: “Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal garments of blue and white and a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.”

God is bringing His kingdom into all nations. All these other nations saw what this God of Israel was doing and they said, *I want to be on that team.*

They still celebrate that day. It's one of the festivals of the Jewish faith. It's called the Feast of Purim. It means lucky. It means luck. It means lot, it means fate. It's a joke. There's no luck in this story. It was all God's providential will. It's people living in that providential will. It's negotiating how to have moral decision-making in God's big plan.

Application

And that's how we are to apply this book. This is how God works these days. I want us to look at this. Look, you cannot change how you got here. But you can change what you do with it. You cannot change the suffering or maybe even the way you've been made or things you've experienced, but you can change what it does to you. You can make a choice in that. And realizing that there's a bigger story going on here and you have to play a part.

There are three responses to finding ourselves where we are right now. We can be pitiful. We can play the victim. That's popular. We just play the victim. And we just allow the things that have happened to us define us. And it's the easiest thing to do. You just give into the anger and the bitterness and you become resentful towards other people. And you just let life happen to you.

Now there's another way to respond, and that is to fight your way through it, to pick yourself up by your bootstraps, to cowboy up, right? And that's a model that works sometimes. But here's the thing: it costs you. It costs you to turn off all the sentimental and real emotions that are attached to some of the circumstances that you might have experienced. And this whole toughening up—sure, you get tough, and so does your soul. So does your heart. And so, you might get respect, maybe even a little bit of fear from people, but it costs you your ability to love.

So, being passive and pitiful or being the John Wayne—that's not what God has for us. This story is about a tender-hearted, courageous queen. The third option is realizing that God is sovereign and we play a part in that sovereign plan. And sovereignty is this, that God has a plan and He has the power to make that plan happen. It's having trust and faith in the nature of God, that He's good and that He's wise. And that you don't have to understand the good, wise plan, but you need to play your part. And if you could just surrender to—not necessarily knowing the

plan, and just playing your part courageously, here's what happens. That your heart stays tender towards God, like Esther's--when the nation prays and fasts and a queen is humbled and God speaks and it can be heard.

The other thing that happens when you just surrender your life to circumstances around you in the providence of God is that God gives you peace in those circumstances, a peace that transcends understanding. I can't even explain it, but it just happens. And then what I love about it is that you get courage without the hardness. You get to be courageous and still hold onto love. You get to be thick-skinned but tenderhearted.

The theme of the book is that God providentially provides protection for those people He has promised and called to His purpose. God provides providential protection for those He has promised that are called according to His purpose. Let's be called according to His purpose. Let's surrender our will and go with God's will for our lives. Let's just let God do whatever He wants in our life.

Mother Teresa said, "I am just a pen in the hands of God. He can write or doodle with me any way He wants."

What if you saw yourself merely as a brush in the hands of the great painter? Would you just let Him paint any way He wants, any way He can? The big picture.

Friends, look around. I feel like where we're living right now, that the whole world is in this. I think Aslan is on the prowl. I think God is up to something huge in a lot of ways. I think there's a spiritual war happening here, because I have never in my lifetime seen this kind of division. There is so much deception and so many lies going on to divide families and people. We argue about the minutiae that we disagree on. And we don't celebrate all the things—we give into the drug of anger and fear and we attack each other. That's the spiritual part that's below. That's not God doing that stuff. That's the demons.

But think what's going on. Families are spending more time together than since the Industrial Revolution. And sometimes that's good and sometimes it's very bad. But when it's bad, people are finally asking for help, and they didn't think they needed help. They were never in these situations. Aslan's on the prowl. When people are willing to ask for help, God is willing to help. When the student is ready, the teacher appears. The teacher's appearing.

And me, I look around and I see proud men and women in all kinds of industries building their own gallows. And I don't want to just sit and watch. I've seen this story so many times. I

love when Haman builds his own gallows. And guys, listen. There's hammering all around us. And let's not just grab some popcorn and watch. Let's play our part. Let's surrender our wills so that we can play a part in God's providential will in bringing His kingdom into all the nations--maybe into your living room. Will you surrender? God's up to great things. Play your part. For such a time as this ...

Let's pray.

Lord God, I'd ask that You would open our eyes to what's bigger. Not that we have to know. We are so drunk on having to know. Lord, let us release that. Help us release that. We don't need to know the details of Your plan. Lord, would You help us, though, see how we can play a part in that plan, that we might not be victims of it, that we might not be these cowboys, but we would be kittens that are now lionesses? That we would play our part, having a tender heart towards You? We can hear your voice when you say, "One more day." And that we would have the courage to step into our own death. If I perish, I perish. Would You give us that kind of courage and that kind of understanding, that tenderness of heart? Would You help us surrender all of our lives to You so that we might enjoy Your presence?

Lord, I'd ask that You bless this church in a very unusual way. that we might play a part in that great plan. I'd ask that the people who need help would have the courage to ask for help. I'd ask that You would guide and direct us as we serve those people. Lord, bless Your church in this great time, in such a time as this. In Jesus' name. Amen.

It's a beautiful book. Please read it this week.

Hey, before I leave, I want to let you know this month we celebrate Robin Wieber's twenty years at Grace Covenant Church. Twenty years! Now listen, a lot happened in those twenty years. Robin came here as the worship director of two different worship styles. Yeah, I know ... he didn't know any better, either. And then—this is a true story—he fell out of a tree. He was trimming some limbs and he fell down and he really wrecked his ankle and he couldn't play the organ like he used to be able to play. And that was him surrendering to God's will and hearing His voice. And Robin transitioned into our caring pastor. That's how most of you know Robin. He does such an amazing job there. Most of the care and concern that happens around

this church is Robin's initiation and follow-through. He has touched this church and so many lives.

Could you send him an e-mail or drop him a line? Or write a letter to the church and we'll get it to him. Tell him congratulations and thank you. He has been a pencil in the hands of the Creator.

Next week we'll have more about the return from the exile. We'll see you then.