

## “Esther: Lose Your Future”

Dr. Jeff Meyers, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Conyers

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bible to the Book of Esther. You may be familiar with the character of Esther, but not the Book of Esther so if you will go to the middle of the Bible to what we know as the Book of Psalms, one of the largest books in the Bible, and just start going to the left. A couple of books before Psalms is the Book of Esther.

She is the second in a line of two women we're going to study in this series entitled Be A Loser. If you're a first time guest or visitor we are addressing different concepts and ideas that we need to lose in our lives so we're in a better position to live life on behalf of God so that He can greater utilize us. We've talked about losing self-reliance, losing bad influences, losing bad decisions, losing all types of things that keep us weighed down in this thing called life.

Today we're going to be challenged to lose that which we can't predict, we can't proclaim and really, we can't even prophesy, and that is this idea of the future, what lies ahead not just tomorrow, next week, next month, or next year, but even just a few moments from now. None of us can truly predict what is going to occur and oftentimes what creeps in is this fear of the future: what do I do or how do I set things up? So today Esther who is known as Queen Esther gives us the perfect model for how to handle our future.

We're primarily going to be the Book of Esther chapter 4, but let me give you just a quick summary to get us to this point in chapter 4. There is a king of Media-Persia, the group that overran the Babylonians. They literally have a kingdom, according to God's Word, that goes from India to Ethiopia. In essence, they are ruling the world. This king has a queen who is very non-compliant. After having a six-month festival, at the end of the festival, his wife, Vashti, was to come out and celebrate and proclaim herself as his partner in ruling the provinces, his partner as his queen, and she rejected and denied that.

Therefore, there was an occasion for the queen to be replaced so the word went out across the land. Now understand across the land was India to Ethiopia. What young lady would be fit to be the king's queen? Over the courses of chapters 2 and 3, we find out that Esther is called to be his queen. But she has a unique characteristic about her: she is Jewish. She has a cousin by the name of Mordecai who is Jewish who sits outside the gates. So now the king of Media-Persia has a Jewish wife, a Jewish queen.

However, he has a right-hand man by the name of Haman. And Haman despises Mordecai, her cousin. And because he despises Mordecai, he has as his desire to eradicate the world from the Jewish people. And you thought that was just Hitler's idea! This idea has been around, unfortunately, since time beginning in the days of Abraham. So the plot goes forth to eliminate and eradicate the Jewish people. And what we have in chapter 4 is the conversation between Mordecai and Esther regarding her role in the future of the Jewish people.

When we look at our current scenarios of life, whether it is a potential or a current illness, sickness, or financial scenario, none of us today is facing a future predicament that our decisions, our behaviors, will determine the fate of an entire group of people. So the example today is one of greater magnitude and greater emotions, and literally says to us if she could do this then, then we can get through today now. In the Book of Esther chapter 4, I want to pick up in verse 11. And what we find in this conversation between Esther and Mordecai is about going in to see the king about the Jewish people.

“11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or women, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. 12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. 13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more

than all the Jews. 14For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? 15Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, 16Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.”

Now how is it that Queen Esther, rising to the role of being the king's partner, gets to this mentality and this attitude regarding her future and the future of her people? I think there are several things we need to study about this character in scripture and the first one is this: that she possessed a very specific attitude regarding life. Attitude is one of those things that at times in life needs to be adjusted. How many times as a parent have you said that somebody needs a little attitude-adjustment? How many times have you as a coach or someone involved in sports said they need an attitude adjustment? Why? Because in just a moment, we're going to talk about the actions that Esther possessed and your actions are going to be based on your attitude. If your attitude is not a believing attitude then your actions are not going to be believing actions. If your attitude is a believing attitude then your actions will be believing actions.

So what are the attitudes that Esther possessed as a model to us of how to see our future put in the hands of God? The first attitude she possesses is here in verse 11: she understood the parameters of her life. You know what a parameter is. It's that which is kind of the bookends, it marks the areas, so to speak. In verse 11 she makes the very clear statement that if I go in to the king unannounced, which I have not been to him for thirty days, if he does not raise his scepter, my head comes off. Do you realize that in the Book of Esther chapter 4, she in no way in any shape or form, indicates that she would conceive or come up with this bright idea of addressing the matter any other way.

Let me tell you why this is important. If you go back and study the Book of

Esther chapters 2 and 3, you will find out that probably thousands of young ladies were brought before the king, presented to the king and there have been movies and books and all kinds of things written regarding Queen Esther, and usually the phrase is called “one night with the king.” We don’t know what was said and we don’t know what was done, all we know is when all was said and done the king said, “I want Esther.” The reason that is key is there was no other human being on the planet that could have pulled this king aside and said, “All right, partner, we need to have a little talk.” Or how many times have we used the phrase “pillow talk?” In other words, could you find a quiet place where you could come up with a plan to some way circumvent this awful thing that Haman is doing? Do you know what her attitude was? She said the parameters are that if I want a wall changed, I’ve got to go in to the king and he’s either got to raise or lower his scepter. She did not have the attitude that until something changes, God cannot do anything.

And let me give you some ideas, and understand that everything I’m about to talk about I promote and I advocate and I like. But let me tell you how this is expressed: we’re not going to see God really move in this country until prayer is back in schools. So until prayer is in school, God doesn’t move? Ah-ha – gotcha! We’re not going to see God in this country until the Bible is used as curriculum? So you mean if the Bible is not that He can’t move? When we say that until this occurs that God can’t move then we’ve got an attitude problem because God can move whether we pray in school or not. And what we’re going to see, and I don’t want to get the cart before the horse, but the paradox of this passage is that the very law that was created to defeat the Jews was used against the ones that created it. In other words, Esther never lifted a finger; she never had to rally the troops. In fact, we’re going to see in just a moment what actions she actually did, but the first attitude she had was she understood that there were certain parameters in line that she had to go by.

And so many times we say but God I would trust You with my future if my 401K wasn’t in the tank. That speaks to everybody in the room, doesn’t it? I trust You with my future if this . . . It’s a struggle. And we think if this occurred

then I could trust. Yet here was this law that she had to go in unannounced with the potential of decapitation. She did not allow the parameters that were in place to diffuse the calling of her life and what God wanted to do in her life.

But there was a second attitude: she understood the providence of God. Now let me define for you what providence is. Providence is God moving in and around you in spite of you. Esther has a unique designation in the Bible: it is the only Book of the Bible that does not contain the word “God.” Throughout Esther, the title or the name of God is not used, but you cannot deny that God is moving mightily in her midst and in the community’s midst. And what we see in verse 14 is that Esther understood providence in light of what Mordecai said, “For if thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”

Do you realize that the law Haman created was to exterminate the Jewish people? And what is happening here with Mordecai and Esther is this: they understand that’s not going to happen. Why? Because you can create the law, you can try to enforce the law, as recently as within the last hundred years, but when God established what we know as the Jewish people through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve tribes, He said they shall persevere, they shall go on and when you get to Revelation chapter 7, guess what? They’re still here. In other words, it doesn’t matter what they do out there, it does not change how God desires to move and work.

And what I’m about to share with you, please listen to me for about three to five minutes, do not turn me off: there are groups of people in our world who think that life will not be what it needs to be until “the church” runs the world. In other words, when Christians are in every position, when Christians have every power. Do I vote for them? Yes. Do I want them there? Yes. But do you understand, I’ve read the Word of God and do you know what it tells me? The closer we get to the end, the worse it gets. In other words, there is always a remnant. There are always churches. There are always groups of people. There are always places where God moves in a mighty, powerful way.

Let me tell you about providence. Providence is that this world is headed in the direction it's going and the only way it's going to really get cleaned up is when Jesus Christ shows up. And that's the providence you and I have to deal with. She had the providence of it doesn't matter what law they create, they can't exterminate us. We have the providence of it doesn't matter who we vote for, how we get activated; understand it's not going to get better and Jesus one day is going to come back. So we're in the same position. There are these parameters. There is this providence.

Then we see this: a perspective that Esther had when Mordecai says this famous phrase in verse 14, "Have you come for such a time as this," and then the last statement of verse 16 when Esther says, "If I perish, I perish." Now this is a unique perspective, but when it comes to the future of Esther, she realized (and this is hard for us to absorb) that God working in her midst and among the people was of greater value than her own personal life. She was not the critical one: God was the most important one. She had a perspective that if doing what God calls me to do "takes me out," then so be it.

Yet, we live in a world of self-preservation. Do you see the attitude difference here? Work within what we've got to work with, realize how things are laid out in scripture and then say whatever You call me to do, God, if that's how I go then that's how I go. Let me tell you where the safest place in the world to be is: exactly where God wants you and it doesn't matter where that location is. When we have young men and women today who literally serve our country all over the world in what we know as the armed forces, the military, if they are where they're supposed to be, serving God where they're supposed to be then that's the safest place in all the world, even compared to your living room because that's where they're supposed to be. And where are you supposed to be? For Queen Esther, when it came to her future, where she was supposed to be was in the king's chamber uninvited and in violation of the current law.

So what were the actions? What did she actually do based on this attitude?

The first thing she did was she actually prepared herself to do so. When I say she prepared herself you've got to go back into chapters 2 and 3, and for the sake of time we can't go through all the passages. When the king needed a new queen, when Vashti was escorted out, and Esther became one of probably thousands with the opportunity, there were certain qualifications that the young lady had to have to possibly be queen. We don't know how old Esther was. In fact, there is a great theological debate about this. Some people believe she was just a young girl, maybe thirteen or fourteen years of age. And there are some people who advocate she may have been as mature as sixty to seventy years of age. We don't know exactly and I know the debate goes on both sides but it doesn't matter if she was fourteen or sixty-four, she lived a life of such preparation that when God called, she was qualified and available.

Let me share with you a relevant story. I think every one of us would respect a man by the name of Billy Graham; a man who has traveled the world and preached literally to millions and millions of people the message of Jesus Christ. Years and years ago, somebody asked Billy Graham this question, "If you knew Jesus was coming back in three years, what would you do?" He said, "I would study for two years and preach for one." A lot of people asked, "What do you mean study for two and preach for one? If it's three years until Jesus comes back, don't you want to get out and get with it?" And then he followed up and said, "I believe that if I dedicate myself to the things of God in my study for two years then I'll see greater things in one year than if I'd just gone out for three."

And I don't think we give enough credit to our future being changed based on us being prepared for what that future is. Oftentimes our preparedness is a few seconds before we have to encounter whatever that situation is. And I think one of the biggest struggles in life is being in a preparation stage wanting to go forth, wanting to go out, wanting to be a part of whatever it is. Oftentimes before God actually puts you into service, He calls you to prepare for that service, whatever that may be.

Esther lived a life of preparation, but she also did something pretty radical to our culture: she lived a life of prayer. In Esther 4:16 when she decides to go in to the king, what does she do? She says get all the people together and pray for me for three days. What Queen Esther understood about her future is that prayer was more important than process; that prayer was more important than the actual implementation because if God did not go before her it wouldn't matter where she went. There are some that have said you can do anything you want but you really can't do anything until you've prayed about it first. That's exactly what Esther did. As she goes forth, she said pray for me. She lived a life of preparation. She lived a life of prayer.

And this may sound frivolous but then she proceeded. It's one thing to talk about it; it's another thing to pray about it, but you're really getting after it when you put one foot in front of the other which takes us to chapter 5. It says, "1Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. 2And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre."

You ask why is it that the king found favor. Was it her ravishing beauty? She might have been beautiful but I'll tell you why the king found favor: because her attitude was in line with God and the people had prayed for her for three days. Just like in the Book of Acts, what we know as the Pentecost event was preceded by seven days of prayer. We wonder why Acts chapter 2 is so magnificent: because they prayed in that event. Oftentimes when it comes to our future, really what we're praying about is our past. "Because of this, I need you to deal with this." And what we find here is the actions of prayer preceded her going in and then when she began the actual process she was granted favor.

This begs kind of the last thing here. We know she had an attitude; we know



there were certain actions, but what were the after-affects? Can you just be honest with yourself: I don't want to be in this position one day. I don't think any of you would want to be in the position where one meeting with one individual over one thing could mean your head rolling off of your body. That is not a future that I look forward to; this is not a future that I can even grasp. Yet Esther models this. What were the after-affects? What happens because she had the right attitude and what happened because she had the right actions? Three things occurred.

The first thing is this: God protected her. Not other people; God protected her. We just read it in chapter 5. How is it that in that time the king would raise the scepter to her? Because they had prayed her through that; she was there for the right reasons and the right attitude and God protected her.

Then this is the second thing I want you to grasp and this may have more relevance to today than any other thing. There was an unbelievable paradox that took place. Now remember, who was it that wanted to exterminate the Jews? A man by the name of Haman. Who was it that sat at the gate? Mordecai. The law was set up to have Mordecai and all the Jews killed. Haman so despised Mordecai that he had a guillotine built and that guillotine was built ten times higher so as to inflict a greater amount of thrust upon his head and to kill him all that more significantly. Haman created the law. Haman created the guillotine. Haman put everything in place to eradicate the people of God. But the queen goes in, has a feast with the king and reveals what's happening. I want you to look at the end of chapter 7, verse 10. This is one of the great verses of scripture. "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." Not Esther's wrath; not Mordecai's wrath, but the king's wrath.

This is the great paradox of the story of Esther: that when the Bible says what I'm about to quote, it is not kidding. Be careful what you do; God is not mocked – you will reap what you sow. And when individuals and families, communities and countries decide to create an environment that

goes against the things of God, against the Word of God, it is but a matter of time until things are reversed. It may not happen in your lifetime; it may not happen in my lifetime, but guess what? According to the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ comes and He defeats His enemies in the very battlefield that they arrange themselves to beat Him. It's a paradox: the very gallows that Haman built to use against Mordecai were used for him.

But there's one last after-affect: there is a celebration that takes place in chapters 9 and 10. The people gather together and they celebrate what we know as Purim. Purim literally is the plural of Pur which means the casting of lots, one of the oldest religious traditions in all of the world. One of the oldest "festivals" known to the world in religious categories is this Purim holiday that is celebrated in behalf of Queen Esther and her willingness to go in. Look at the after-affects of what happened because of her attitude and her actions: God protected her, a paradox took place, and a celebration occurred.

The last time I checked, those three things are what most Bible-believing, born-again Christians really want in life, right? Don't you really want God to protect you? Don't you truly want those who are opposed to the faith of Jesus Christ to sometimes just get what's coming to them? And don't you wish we could just celebrate God's goodness? How does that happen? We've got to do like Esther did. We've got to have the right attitude and we've got to follow it by the right actions. And when we do that, we can literally lay out our future, whatever it is economically, whatever it is politically, whatever it is educationally, whatever it is in relationships, and whatever it looks like. If we follow her example of attitude, if we follow her example of actions what will happen is that God will and can protect us and take care of us.

The perfect example of this, and then I'll come to our time of invitation, is this. If you have not yet, every single one of us needs to do what I'm talking about: every one of us needs to come to a place, a time, and a point in our lives when we realize we've sinned, we realize we've violated the commandments and the laws of God and that we need Jesus to save us. Do you realize when

you do that, you are basically saying, “God, my future is a mess unless You take over.” And I want to ask you a very rhetorical question before I pray and John comes and leads us in our time of invitation: so we’re willing to place eternity and that future in His hands, but not next year? Let’s pray.