

“Seizing Our Moment” // Esther 4:8-17 // 2017 *Multiply*

Announcement (Multiply Handout)

Over the last two years, we’ve focused all of our generosity in one fund, Multiply. Our primary goal has never been financial, it is to see 100% of our people engaged in the mission of God through sacrificial giving.

We’ve seen God move in incredible ways as our church has said “yes” to what God has called us to do. Two years ago, we filled out these commitment cards and re-dedicated ourselves to the mission of God here. We have seen God multiply those seeds of faith again and again. Since we started Multiply, we’ve seen...

- 6,942 families participating
- Number of people baptized
- 228 people are living today overseas which brings the number to right at 500 all time sent, with almost 80% of them in the hardest and least reached places on earth. There are another 80 in our Intl Church Planting Cohort just waiting to be sent.
- 68 new small groups formed ↑ 3,336 in total attendance

¹ <https://jdgreear.com/blog/an-incredible-story-of-gods-saving-power/>

Works Consulted:

“Esther,” David Platt

“Esther: The Diva God Used,” Tony Evans

“God at Work,” James MacDonald

“God’s Sovereignty Comforts Us,” Tim Keller

“God’s Sovereignty Changes Us,” Michael Keller

What you got on your way in [HANDOUT] tells just a few of the stories from this journey. In this, **you’re not going to see many numbers** or much talk of bank accounts or budgets. But you will find a taste of how God has worked in and through the Summit—how God has multiplied the firstfruits of what we have sown. These stories have been made possible by your faith and sacrificial giving.

Let me share one¹ really quickly that’s not in there. One of the people we have sent to Central Asia said that over Christmas this past year he was visiting a remote village in the mountains and was having lunch with about a dozen of the village leaders. The conversation quickly turned to religious things so he shared the Christmas story, which he had been praying for a chance to do. He said they politely listened until he got done and then said, *“Yes, yes. We know this story. And believe it. We asked you here today because we want to know, **what do we do now?**”*

Our missionary said, “What?” They explained that someone else years ago had shared the story with them and gave them some Bibles, and they gathered to read them but didn’t know much more than that. They wanted to know if our missionary could help them establish a church. Our missionary said, “How many are in this group?” Thinking it would be a dozen or so. They said, **“Oh, about 200.”**

Our missionary said,

People like me shouldn’t get to see this. How do I get to see the birth of a church in a new people group? What did I do to deserve

that? How could I possibly be qualified to be part of this? I can just imagine the conversation around the throne of God:

*“Really Lord, you want **him** there? Do you think that will work?”* one of the angels asks.

And God answers, *“Well, yeah, his language is frankly sub-par; he isn’t exactly good at the work in general; he wasn’t that impressive in America. But he is there. Besides, no one on earth is going to think he had anything to do with it, so it’s kind of how I work.”*

Summit, your generosity made that story, and many more like it, possible.

As 2 Corinthians says, God has **“enriched us in every way to be to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God”** (2 Corinthians 9:11 ESV).

Introduction

If you have your Bibles, turn them to the book of Esther. If it helps, that’s on page 410 of my Bible... It’s right after Nehemiah and right before Job.

Esther is one of two books in the OT named for a woman, and believe it or not, this is a controversial book. The reason is that God’s name is not mentioned even one time in the whole book! In fact, several times throughout history various Jewish councils and Christian councils that have tried to have the book removed from the official Bible. Thankfully, however, God kept it in there for us—because it really has something really important to teach us, I believe. And **the fact that God’s name is not mentioned** in it is part of the way he teaches that to us.

I am going to 0 in on a specific moment in Esther’s life that I believe parallels where we are as a church—it’s in chapter 4. But to get there, I’ll need to give you some of the **backstory**.

The year is **circa 483BC**... the Jewish people have been in exile in Persia for about 100 years (which is modern day Iran). They had been driven into exile because they wouldn’t obey God. **But in 536 B.C.** (about 50 years before this book was written), a King named Cyrus had issued an edict declaring that the Jews could return to their homeland and re-build the temple. **That effort was led by Ezra and Nehemiah**, which come right before Esther in your Bible. But there was a large group that stayed and didn’t go with Ezra and Nehemiah. And they were kind of controversial, because many thought these Jews were living in disobedience, because they had not gone back into the Promised Land when God had opened the door.

Esther was one of those. The book of Esther begins with a king named Ahasuerus, whose nickname was Xerxes, doing what kings do best—throwing an enormous party for himself.

(And Ahasuerus) displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days. He threw a 6 month party. And then, watch this, after 6 months, the *real* party began. **At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least.** (Esther 1:4-5 CSB).

Vs. 8 describes the party: **⁸The drinking was according to royal decree: “There are no restrictions.”**

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine. IOW, on the final night of this party, **King Ahasuerus has gotten stone-cold plastered**—and, in a drunken fit of male chauvinistic rage, he orders his queen, Vashti, vs. 11, to come into the room **“with her**

crown on her head” (with the implication being *only* wearing the crown on her head) so that all his drunken guy-friends could “gaze on her beauty.”

Not surprisingly, Vashti is not as excited about this, idea, and she refuses. And good for her. Right, ladies?

But this **embarrasses the king in front of his buddies** and he goes back into his bedroom to sulk and one of his wise guys comes to him and says, “*King, bro, this is serious. You gotta do something about this. And not just for your sake, but for the sake of all men everywhere.*” In fact, this might be my favorite verse in Esther. If you don’t, this guy says,

“Before this day is out, the wife of every one of us will hear what the queen did and will start talking to their husbands in the same way. There will be no end to the contempt and anger throughout your realm.” (1:18)

“King, if when we command our wives to come out naked in front of our drunk buddies she won’t do it, what’s this kingdom going to come to?”

So, Vashti gets kicked to the curb. But now Ahasuerus needs a new Queen.

Chapter 2: To Ahasuerus comes up with the brilliant idea to hold a contest eerily similar to the show, *The Bachelor* in order to find a new queen. Here’s what chapter 2 says, “**2 Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king...** (which is not usually how you’d describe the women on the bachelor, but, whatever...) **then the young woman who pleases you most will be made queen instead of Vashti.**”

Here is how this contest worked. **You entered the king’s harem** and the king would try you out. You’d appear before the king, I guess you’d answer some questions and do some kind of talent, and then sleep with the king that night and he’d pick.

This is the contest Esther enters. **“And Esther had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at.” (2:7)** The literal word here in Hebrew is “bodacious.” Attractive in face and body.

Esther is going to turn into a remarkable woman of faith, but at this point she is not. She is straight up sleeping with the king out of wedlock in order to get a position of power in the palace. **Dads, would you be excited** if you got a call from your daughter in college telling you she was entering this contest?

In fact, vs. 20 says **she concealed the fact that she was Jewish, which also meant she was probably silent about her belief in the God of Israel**, because talking about that would have **given away that she was a Jew.**

The good news is Esther wins the contest. The bad news is she chose a straight immoral path to get there. **Can you see why God may not have wanted to put his name** in this book? It’s downright messy.

Before we get into chapter 3, the author includes a little detail that will be important later. There’s a man named Mordecai—she is Esther’s cousin and the man who raised her—and he finds out about a plot to kill the king. He stops it, and saves the king’s life. The King never finds out.

Now, **chapter 3** is where it really starts to get interesting. Enter **Haman**, the villain. **3 After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman the Agagite.**

- You know he's the villain because he is called an "Agagite," and they were the people in the Bible who had sworn themselves the enemies of God and whom God has promised to destroy.
- (BTW, **fun fact** I learned about this story this week. Orthodox Jews celebrate the feast of Purim every year during the season when this happened, and as they tell the story, every time Haman is mentioned the children respond by hissing/booing. I thought it would be more authentic if we did that. Want to try it?)

Ahasuerus promoted Haman in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials. Ahasuerus made him **prime minister**.

²The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage. ³The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai (who, again, was Esther's cousin), "Why are you disobeying the king's command?"

- (Scholars point out that this question in verse 3, btw, "**Why are you disobeying the king's command?**" is the **central question of the book**. Who is the **real King in control** here? Who really calls the shots, and whom ought we to be concerned about obeying?)

Well, the fact that Mordecai won't bow down to Haman makes him madder than a 3-legged dog trying to bury a bone on a frozen pond, and when he finds out Mordecai is a Jew, he hatches a plan to kill all the Jews (3:7-8), to wipe Judaism off the face of the earth. He's like the **Ahmadinejad** of the 5th century B.C.)

He presents his plan to Ahasuerus, and Ahasuerus, who evidently has a pretty hands-off approach to governing, doesn't really pay any attention to what Haman is asking and tells him to go ahead... because he's planning his next party or on Twitter calling people who disagree with him nasty names or whatever.

Well, **CHAPTER 4**, Mordecai, who hangs out around the palace, hears about this plot he gets a message to Esther and tells her, "*You've got to do something about this!*"

And **Esther sends a message back to him**, saying, **(4:11)** "*Cousin Mordecai, I appreciate your concern, but what can I do? You remember how Ahasuerus responds to women disagreeing with him in public? Remember? He had Vashti banished for refusing to strut her stuff naked in front of all of his drunk buddies... Imagine what he'd do if I, a woman, had the audacity to confront him and suggest he's making bad government decisions! He'd have me killed.*"

Persian law said that if anybody came before the king uninvited, they could be killed. And for this little Jewish girl to appear before the poster child of male chauvinism and tell him he doesn't know how to run his government? This is a death wish!

Mordecai's response to her, in chapter 13, is timeless, and our main text for the morning: [13] "**Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. (IOW, you are not really safe).** [14] For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for just such a time as this?" **(Esther 4:13-14)**

As we've seen, Esther didn't start out well in her walk of faith, but this is one of those defining moments for her: "**I will go to the king, though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.**" **(Esther 4:16)**

And so, **chapter 5**, Esther enters the palace and the King, who evidently is still taken by her beauty, raises his scepter, which was a symbol she was accepted by him, and says, "*My queen! What would you like?*" She breathes a sigh of relief and says, "*I'd really like you to come to a banquet I'm throwing tomorrow, and bring Haman.*"

The King agrees, and at this 1st banquet she **doesn't mention anything about the prime minister's genocide plan**, his "final solution," she just invites the two of them to another banquet the next night.

Well, **Haman goes home that night really happy**, because of all the people in the Kingdom, the Queen specifically invited him, and so now he feels like he is BFF's with the King *and* Queen. The three of them are like the "**power team**" of the Kingdom.

But as he is going home, he passes through the city gate, and when he does, Mordecai does that thing where he just stands erect and just glare at him. (Everyone else is bowing, and Mordecai makes the "Loser" sign on his head.)

Well, that totally kills Haman's mojo, makes **him madder than a mosquito** in a mannequin factory. So, he decides he can't wait until the general genocide to get rid of Mordecai. That needs to happen tomorrow.

So, **when he gets home he orders the palace builders to work all night constructing a gallows 75 feet** high to hang Mordecai on, and he plans to ask the king the next morning for permission to carry out the sentence (5:12–13).

Well, **it just so happens on that very same night the King can't sleep**, and so around 2 in the morning he says to one of his guards, "Go get a book and read it to me." And this guy **randomly picks a book out of the library**, it just so happens that the book he chooses records the story where Mordecai saved the King's life. The King says, "This is remarkable? What did we do for Mordecai?" The servant says "nothing," so the King decides that he is going to do this *first thing in the morning*. So, as soon as the sun rises and the King gets to the office, guess who **just so happens** to walk in the room? Haman, to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. (NO MORE BOOING)

And before he can say anything, the King says, "**Hey man, I got a question** (get it, Haman?) What should be done for the man that the king wants to honor? And, of course, Haman thinks, "He's talking about me. He wants to honor me." And the prime minister says, "*Let a wreath be put around his neck and let him be paraded through the streets* and let a high-ranking government official call out as they drive through the streets, "**This is a man whom the king loves!**" And the king says, "Great idea. The guy I want to honor is named Mordecai, and the guy who should do the shouting is you." **Which is pretty doggone funny**, you have to admit.

Well, **after this little charade**, Haman is about to lose his mind, madder than an Albino in a snowstorm, so **he kicks his plan to kill all the Jews into overdrive**.

The next night, all 3 go to the banquet together again, but this time, Esther tells the king about the plot against the Jews, and reveals that she too is a Jew, so she is in danger.

And the King says, "Who would conceive such a plot?" And Esther points across the table at Haman, who has his mouth full of mutton, and says, "Behold the man." Well, now it's Ahasuerus' turn to be loses his mind and he storms out of the room, and Haman goes over to Esther and grabs ahold of her dress to plead for his life. But apparently he accidentally falls on top of her on the couch and just as that happens, guess who walks back in the room? **King Ahasuerus! Who says, "What, now you are trying to rape my wife, also?"** And he orders Haman to be hung on the next available gallows, which just so happens to be the gallows he had constructed for Mordecai.

And so, it is, because of Esther's defining moment of faith—Esther, who got a really rough start in life—God saved the Jews. And a few generations after this, one of the descendants of the people that Esther saved that night would be visited by an angel and told that she

was pregnant with the Messiah, the Son of God. And Jesus came into the world, and we believed on him, and now we sit here today.

4 Truths that Will Help You Seize Your Moment

1. God can use 'Mordecais,' and he can use 'Esthers.'

- "Mordecais" are the kinds of people you normally think of in church. They are good people; sincere people of faith, and haven't been involved in any major scandals. They have "boring testimonies..." The worst thing they've done in life is speeding or forgetting to recycle.
- "Esthers" are people whose lives are filled with compromises and mistakes. They don't need to be convinced that they're sinners. They know it. But they think that their past has disqualified them from God being able to use them.
- From this story, you see that God has a plan for both. Let's be candid for a moment, shall we? Esther is not the most upstanding character in the Bible.
 - She is never commended in the NT.
 - She got her position by winning a sex competition.
 - And like I showed you, Esther and Mordecai both are still in Persia several generations after Cyrus gave permission for Jews to return to the land. The fact that they haven't returned should be a mark of suspicion even as you start the book.

And yet, *Esther is the person that God uses to preserve the Messianic line*. Why? It has to be to show that God brings his salvation into the world through unlikely, weak instruments. Esther is young, foreign orphan with a checkered past. And yet God brings salvation through her rather than Mordecai—the strong, morally upright man.

My point: It doesn't matter what your history is. It doesn't matter what your ability is. It matters what your availability is.

- God has placed many of you at a specific place, with specific opportunities, for his kingdom. Many of you are "in the palace," so to speak—with large access to resources or influence.
- And maybe you look back with a lot of regrets as to how you got there. But God wants to start a new thing with you, beginning right now.
- It's never too late for you to begin the journey of faith.
- Yes, you need to ask his forgiveness for mistakes you've made in the past, and maybe you'll need to make restitution where you can. But salvation is about new beginnings, and today is the day of salvation for many of you.

2. God has been at work in your life whether you've recognized it or not.

Again, where is the name of God in this book? *It's not there*. Not one time.

But the working of God is all over this book. His fingerprints are all over the story. Think about all the "coincidences" that led to Esther being in this position.

- One day Queen Vashti just so happens to upset her husband, and he just so happens to cast her out and just so happens to come up with a contest that Esther hears about and enters. Esther, just so happens to be a beautiful Jewish woman, who just so happens to find favor in the King's eyes above all others. And Esther just so happens to be Mordecai cousin, who just so happens to hear about a plot to kill the King. Mordecai's act is written in the book, but it just so happens that for some reason, he isn't honored at that point.
- Haman just so happens to have it out for the Jews with a particular hatred for Mordecai.
- It just so happens that the night before Mordecai is to be hanged, the King can't sleep, and it just so happens that the guy who goes to get a bedtime story for the king—out of all the books he could

have pulled off the shelf—pulls out the one that tells the story of Mordecai saving the King's life.

- And when the King decides that they need to honor Mordecai first thing in the morning, it **just so happens** that the first one to walk in the room is Haman.
- It **just so happens** that at the banquet where Esther unveils Haman's evil plan the King **just so happens** to come back in at the moment he thinks Haman is trying to rape his wife. And it **just so happens** that when the King orders Haman to be hanged, the only gallows available are the ones Haman built for Mordecai.
- **It's like my friend David Platt says, "Folks, you can't write a script any better than this."**²
- **Do you realize what the book of Esther is teaching is about history?** God has the whole system rigged. He's written the story of your life for the purposes of his great redemptive plan. **Just like all these coincidences preserved the Messianic line** that brought salvation to you, so the coincidences in your life have been rigged so you can bring salvation to others.
- You have a **divinely appointed role** in the kingdom.
 - **People you need to share Christ** with.
 - People that you need to **serve and bless** in Jesus's name: homeless, orphan, prisoner...
 - A **generation of students** you need to impact for the gospel.
 - You've **been given financial resources** for just such a time as this, to enable this church to reach the Triangle and from here, the world.

Listen: **You have been chosen and blessed for something bigger.** And if you don't grasp the bigger picture, you will lose your purpose.

3. Life is risk. So, risk for something that lasts.

The word "perish" or "destroy" (*abad*) occurs in this book *more than it does the entire Pentateuch—the first 5 books of the Bible*, which makes you feel as you read it like danger lurks at every turn.

Throughout the book it feels like their lives, and God's entire plan of redemption, are hanging by a thread.

This is an important lesson: there really is no safe person and no safe place in this story. But, **what we do know is that God's purposes** will surely be accomplished. **So, risk your life for them.**

This is the essence of what Mordecai says to Esther. He says (4:13), **"Listen, you stay silent or you speak. Your call. "But do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews."** What's certain is that God will deliver his people. You might die either way. So, you might as well go out doing what's right."

Safety is a myth. Our lives are filled with vulnerability. **We don't choose between safe and risky:** We choose between a risk for God or a risk without him.

John Piper, "Risk is woven into the fabric of our finite lives. We cannot avoid risk even if we want to. Why not say with Esther, 'For the sake of Christ, I'll try it! (I'll invest my money. I'll go on the mission trip. I'll take my career overseas. I'll join this church planting team.)' And if I perish, I perish?"

Esther was not confident that her life would be saved. She was confident that God's purposes would be done. And she bet her life on God's purposes.

² David Platt, "For Such a Time As This," McLean Bible Church, September 24, 2017, accessed October 20, 2017: <http://www.radical.net/sermons/sermons/for-such-a-time-as-this>

I want to bet my life, my bank account, on God's plans. And I'm confident that one day, when my story is re-told, I'll be glad I did.

You see, we have an even greater assurance of how this will turn out than Esther did, because we see in Esther's story only a shadow of our coming Savior. **Esther saved her people by risking her spot** in the place to intercede for the people of God. This prefigured Jesus who, years later, would leave the ultimate palace, willingly—not because someone had to ask him, but because he volunteered. **And he not only risked his life**, he offered it up to purchase our salvation.

In that cross, we see that God was always fully in control, overturning all the diabolical plans of the world's Hamans for good, and overwriting their wicked schemes with resurrection.

This **same God promises that one day people** from every tribe and tongue will worship him (Rev 5). He says, "Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance" (Ps. 2:8). He says history will not close until there is a thriving witness for his name in every people group on earth (Matt 24:14). **So, we go with confidence that he will finish what he started**, and even greater confidence than Esther could have had.

Here's the truth. I've read the Bible **all the way to the end, through the concordance**, and all the way to the maps. And **here's what is clear: God wins**. He writes the epilogue.

God wins, the only question is whether we'll be part of it or not.

I've told you before how I see the kind of ministry we do: The **proverbial woodpecker** (this is my kids' favorite illustration that I tell)...

Yes, there is risk involved in the kingdom of God. **But it's a risk you absolutely must take.**

- Some of you know I wrote a book about our church called *Gaining by Losing...* In there is a chapter called "There's more than one way to be wicked," ...

Well, lastly,

4. The need is urgent.

Esther stood at the crossroads of a literal life or death moment for Israel. If she didn't act, people would die.

We also stand, in many ways, at a literal crossroads of life and death for others. Consider this:

- On average, around **100 babies** will be aborted in our area tomorrow.
- Every day **20-30k children die** from starvation or a preventable disease.
- There are **more slaves around the world today** than at any other time in history.
- Most tragically, there are **millions of people around us that will spend an eternity in hell**. There are **3.1 billion** people around the world without a gospel witness. Don't turn that into a statistic! Each one has a face and a name. Each one is made in the image of God just like you and me. Each one knows what it's like to be lonely, and afraid, and sad, just like one of our kids, and going to hell for each of them would be every bit the tragedy it would be for one of us. **How can we just sit by?**
 - **Many of you care about global suffering**, and that is good. The greatest suffering is eternal suffering. Your heart breaks for those who hunger. The greatest hunger is for the bread of life. You want to see people freed from slavery. The greatest slavery is slavery to sin.
 - **Of all the things to give your life to**, the gospel is the most important.
- Just like **Esther couldn't ignore** her life and death realities, **neither can we**.

Conclusion

Summit Church, we're in the **same moment as Esther**—a divinely orchestrated moment, with life or death implications. We've been placed here for ***“just such a time such as this.”***

We've called our moment **“Multiply.”** Multiply is where 100% of our people here offer their lives completely to God, without restriction, for use in his global purposes.

My challenge to you:

- **If you made a Multiply commitment, finish strong:** You and we only reap the benefit if we persevere.
- If you are new, join in. Maybe you will want to make a large gift. **You can do that simply by starting to give.** All that you give into our offering goes automatically into Multiply.
- I told you last week, if you have questions, you can visit **Summitrdu.com/Multiply** for more details, or you can ask us whatever question you want.

As I said last week, MULTIPLY is not a 2-year journey, but a way of responding to what God has given us, a response we want to continue for the rest of our lives! **Multiply is us** saying, “God, you put us here in this moment for just such a time as this; and you have put this seed into my hand for just such a time as this, to sow into your kingdom!”

Check out this awesome VIDEO about what Multiply has meant for us over the past two years...

