

I. Set Up: Today we begin a new four week series. It's a look at how various biblical figures dealt with the crises they faced, and today Mike kicks this off with a look at Esther – and our need to have wise, older mentors to help us navigate the white water moments we face.

## II. Intro

A. The first six months of 2020 have been some combination of historic, interesting, confusing, catastrophic and overwhelming. You know that – and you are probably also aware of all the concerns about what the next six months will bring.

1. I read something about a Tennessee sheriff who asked residents to stop flushing their drugs down the toilet because he doesn't want to deal with alligators who are hyper-aggressive after ingesting meth. And I was forced to admit, as I was thinking about what else might go wrong in 2020, “meth-gators” was not on my list.

B. Well, as we move deeper into the summer – and as we take some tentative steps out of sheltering-in-place, as conversations about race continue, as the economy tries to reboot, as schools prepare to open even as COVID spikes - I thought it prudent to mine some insights from a handful of biblical characters who made some good decisions during their version of 2020.

C. As a general rule, we look to Christ for our premier example.

1. Jesus is our Savior – He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And after he does it, it's done. We do not need to add a thing. He pays our debt and secures our salvation. We do not need to die on a cross. Our relationship with God pivots around the finished work of Jesus. Our eternal destiny does not rest on our ability to live up to his example. For which I am THANKFUL.

2. So, first of all, He is our savior. Additionally, He is also our Lord and master, and He is our teacher.

D. But He is also our example. We have much to learn about how to live from Jesus, including how he navigated his own crises. He was thoughtful and courageous. He spoke truth to power. He looked after others even as he was being attacked - arranging care for his mother, asking for forgiveness for those killing him. We have so much to learn from Jesus. He is more than an example. But He is our primary example.

E. However, he is not the only one we can learn from. There are others, who either offer good advice or model a helpful path.

III. The Bible encourages us to learn from others. One of the big sections of the Bible is called wisdom literature. It is full of advice. On top of that we have examples of people who are held up as setting a good path for us. In this series we are going to look at a few.

- A. As you may know, business literature has been filled with advice for a crisis.
1. Seems like this round they all said: be sure to exercise, act quickly, focus on what matters, don't wait for normal to return.
  2. There were also check lists – lots of check lists.
  3. I read more of these pieces than perhaps I should have. And at some point, I found myself reflecting on biblical characters who have managed some very challenging moments well.
- IV. In any event, today we look at Esther – a book that offers advice about advice. If you have your Bible, turn with me to the Book of Esther – which is shortly before the Book of Psalms
- A. G, E, L, N, D, Josh, Jud, R, I & 2 Sam, 1 & 2 K, 1 & 2 Ch, Ezra, Neh, Esther, Job, Psalms, Prov.
- B. Which is odd and unique in that it fails to mention God. In fact, if you were reading Esther and someone asked, “What it’s about?” The right answer could be: murder, intrigue, lust, power. You might also say, “and one young woman’s quest to do the right thing.” But there is no mention of God, faith, worship or Jesus in this book.
- V. The events described take place in 460 B.C., which is right around the time of Socrates.
- A. The glory days of Israel are long gone. The nation had split after Solomon’s death. The Northern tribes had been overrun by the Assyrians, the southern tribes had been overrun by the Babylonians and taken into exile for 70 years and some of them have subsequently returned.
- B. The Persians – think modern day Iran – had emerged as the new power. They had defeated Babylon and allowed the Jews to return home.
1. They are not Boy Scouts. They are still requiring huge taxes. But they had allowed the Jews to return home. And many already had, with a goal of rebuilding Israel. But many stayed.
- C. The events described in Esther take place fifty years after the Persians had come to power.
- D. The book opens with by telling about a Persian king named Xerxes, who threw a party that lasted six months – making it little different than most people’s freshman year in college.
- E. During the last week the King goes for broke.
1. He hosts a banquet in his palace garden that lasts for seven days. And on the last day he calls for his queen to come and parade before his friends.

2. I'm reading, Esther 1:10-11: **On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.**

3. The guess is that she was to wear the crown and little else. She refuses. Vs. 12: **But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.**

4. Xerxes feels humiliated in front of his friends and he flies into a rage. And while he is good and mad his counselors – think astrologers – encourage him to issue a decree, one that could not be revoked, that she is never again to be allowed to see the king

a) No word on whether she thought that was a bad thing or not. She might have thought, “Score! Finally! Yes!”

b) It doesn't appear to have been forever. The point is, Xerxes is not exactly a model of thoughtful leadership and self-control. He is petty and – more to the point – short sighted.

c) And very predictably, after the banquet was over the King gets lonely and starts missing his wife.

F. Esther 2:2-4 reads:

1. **Then the king's personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.**

2. It's hard to imagine a more pagan setting. If you are reading between the lines you understand that the plan is to bring in the best-looking single women from throughout the land in an attempt to satisfy his sexual appetite.

a) This is not the kind of stuff that many people expect to find in the Bible, because they believe that the Bible was a book written by very holy people to other very holy people about how to be holy.

b) The Bible is actually a book that speaks directly to our situation. It is a book that clearly and completely understands the human condition, our needs, desires, temptations and frustrations and offers some solutions.

G. So the palace dispatches their men to find the best looking freshman girls for the king. At this point, the two main characters enter stage right:

1. Mordecai and his younger cousin, Esther, who is an orphan.

2. And there are two things to note:
  - a) First, because Esther is an orphan, Mordecai is raising her as if she were his daughter.
  - b) Also, Esther is beautiful and lovely to look at.
3. Now, you do not need an Ivy League degree to see where this is heading.
4. The king's servants go marching around the cities looking for the most attractive women, and when they find Esther she is brought into the king's harem. And not only is Esther picked for the harem, but her beauty completely overwhelms the king and she becomes Miss Persia herself.
5. Little Orphan Esther becomes the queen of the land. And the king throws another big party and he's in such a good mood that he lowers taxes on all the people. This is a stable guy.

H. We do not have enough time – or the need - to unpack any of this a verse at a time. Let me tell you what happens.

1. At the same time that Esther becomes queen, a man by the name of Haman is elevated above all of the other princes in the land to be number two in the kingdom – the Vice President of Persia. And, as was customary, everyone and their brother fell on their faces to show their respect.
2. Everyone, that is, except Mordecai, Esther's uncle, who will not worship anyone besides the Lord. Well, when word gets back to Haman that Mordecai would not bow down to him, he got so mad that he not only wanted to kill Mordecai but he wanted to kill everybody that looked like Mordecai. And he hatched a plan to kill every Jew in the land.
3. So in chapter three, Haman goes to the king and says, "Look, these Jews are nothing but trouble. They are unlike every other nation you've ever conquered. They are not mixing in. They're keeping their own peculiar laws and their own peculiar religion, so you'd better move fast to take them down before they rise up and take your throne."
4. So now Xerxes, already a study in wisdom, issues another decree stating that on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month everyone was supposed to annihilate the Jews – young and old, male and female – and to take all of their goods and send a lot of them back to the King.
5. Xerxes approves a scheme to wipe out the Jews, very much in the mold of Adolf Hitler himself. However, the Jews are God's chosen people and God isn't about to let them be wiped out by a power-hungry prince and a playboy king.

6. And this is where Esther steps up - Esther, Xerxes' Queen. The one who lights up his life, is a Jew. Xerxes doesn't know this. Nor does Haman. But Mordecai does, and when he finds out about the decree he immediately sends Esther a text stating that she has got to change the king's mind.

7. And she initially writes back and says, no. I don't want to. It's too hard, it's too risky. There is a rule. If I ask for an audience with the king, and he says no, I am killed. And for 30 days, he has not asked me to visit. I have fallen out of favor. I cannot do this. Too risky.

VI. Now, Esther's crisis is not our crisis. She was living 3,000 years ago and dealing with inter-court politics. We have different issues in front of us. But there is a sense that a crisis is a crisis. And one of the things that can make a crisis especially vexing is, we have no experience navigating this moment. And we end up making a bad move. Let me note two things worth pondering.

A. First, Esther does not want to get involved

1. It's been a month since Xerxes has called for her. He has not proven himself to be a man of wise judgment. The last queen is rotting away in some belfry somewhere because she crossed him. All things considered, it is easier to just sit back – to not get involved – to not risk – to not try and be a hero. To which Mordecai responds with a statement that serves as the focal point of the book

2. Esther 4:13 **Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?**

3. Mordecai says to Esther: Don't be a fool. God doesn't need you to save His people, you simply have a chance to do it.

4. Men and women, I do not know how any of this turns out: COVID, discussions about racial unrest, economic maladies. I only know, Go has chosen to use broken, flawed people like you and me when we make ourselves available.

B. Secondly, Esther is saved from making a big mistake by an older, trusted advisor. Had she not had a mentor, it seems likely things would have turned out very differently – principally for her. God will make sure his plans are enacted. God will bring about his kingdom. God's agenda is unstoppable. Our involvement is optional.

1. Esther didn't see that very clearly. You might not either. But Mordecai did, and Esther listened.

2. The first piece of advice I have about advice is, it's good to have a trusted someone offering it to you, especially in a crisis.

VII. Now just in case you want to know, Esther does come around. She goes to the king and he spares her life and he listens to her concerns and spares the Jews. Actually, it is better than that. And every March 13 and 14, the Jews continue to celebrate Esther's bravery – but I'll let you read about it yourself. It's all in the Book.

VIII. Here is my point. The Greeks talk about two types of time: *chronos* and *Kairos*. It seems that this is Kairos moment.

A. It is an opportunity. And, in a line attributed to Rahm Emmanuel but it was around well before that – a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. It is an opportunity that you do not want to let slip away. But it is more likely to be if you are charting your course by yourself.

B. You need a Mordecai – a mentor. Let me put it this way.

1. If you are young, you need to go looking for a mentor; if you are older, you need to be a mentor. And if you are in between, you probably should have one and be one at the same time.

C. There is a sense in which this is not very American. We are supposedly all about being rugged individualists. But that is part of our problem. We need each other. You need a Mordecai.

IX. For the last five years I have tried to lean into my, uh, advancing age and become an encourager and mentor to a handful of younger senior pastors. I had to get pushed into it because I did not feel ready.

A. As an aside, I think not feeling ready is one of the qualities you want in a mentor. Although, just because you do not feel qualified doesn't mean you are.

X. I have always been zealous to learn from people who are doing what I want to do – or who seem to have qualities I want for myself.

A. When I was in my twenties I would drive four hours to spend time with either of two men who were about ten years older than I was. This week I will be on three phone calls with people I am trying to learn from.

B. We see this in the Bible: Barnabas helped Paul who helped Timothy and coached him to help others.

C. These are safe relationship where you can be honest and vulnerable and ask for help.

XI. I apologize for using myself as an example in the good sense in this message. I try not to – and perhaps I do not have many opportunities to do so! But, I have a long track record of trying to get help and being convinced that I could make better decisions if I could find someone who had experience.

XII. In the next few weeks we are going to look at a few examples of people we can learn from. .