

Prayer of Preparation: *May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

God is speaking. God is always speaking to us as individuals and as a community. God spoke into the hearts of Persian kings, and scribes, and interpreters, and men, and women, and builders, and singers, and dancers, and gate keepers, and everyone who had a hand in returning to Jerusalem. God spoke to them all. God spoke to them then just as much as God is speaking to us this very day.

God is always speaking. Even when we are in a place and a time where we can't speak God's name, God is speaking. Ask Esther...ask Mordecai. If you undertake a careful study of the Book of Esther, you see God's divine hand all over that situation and you know that God is speaking into the heart of their circumstance; but what you don't see anywhere in the entire book of Esther is the name of God. Yet, we know that God is always speaking.

Esther's book is one of foolishness; really bad advice; really, really bad behavior; and some seriously misplaced pride! The behavior on display in this book is worthy of a daytime soap opera. Modern day viewers would be at the edge of their seats waiting to see what happens next: the twists, the turns, the drinking, the womanizing, the pride, the prejudice, the fighting, the killing...Esther's book has it **ALL!** Yet through it all, this is the story of how God works. This is the story how the hand of the divine hovered over the situation, and worked in and through people to ensure God's will be done.

In Esther, we find a woman who has been placed in a terrible situation - literally held captive for her entire life because she was born beautiful. Esther's only goal is to survive the hand she has been dealt and to tell the truth, I don't blame her. But God.

Esther's story is exploding with moments of but God. God is ever present and God is intervening so that in time, Esther looks beyond where she is and becomes the person, the woman, whose voice rises to challenge the status quo. Esther becomes the woman who upsets the plans of a would-be destroyer of her people.

Think about the position Esther was in then. In a time when women had no power and in a place where her position as queen could be taken away at the whim of the king...the drunken king. Think about your own position of power. A place where to say what you believe means termination. And think about God. God's divine presence is *everywhere*. If you never say the name of Jesus, if you never tell anyone that you serve a risen savior...it's okay. God is there. God is with you in whatever position you may hold.

Did Esther ever mention God? No. Did Mordecai ever mention the God of heaven? No. But they both served God because to not serve God was not an option. To not see the hand of a divine God in heaven stretched out upon them and their people would not have been a possibility.

Take a minute to think about it...there are days and times in which we are all Esthers; working within a fallen system yet in our own small way we say: But God. God sees each of us. God sees our shortcomings, our hesitations, our fears, our struggles, our pride, our prejudice, our everything. But God.

God says...go do it despite our fear, our anxiety, and our shortcomings. No matter where we've been, no matter what we've done, no matter who we are, no matter how old we are...God can use us. We can go from being oppressed, distressed, stressed out, drugged out, drunk out, run out, and any other out we can think of because into our lives comes the words: But God. But God can use even you and even me. Brothers and sisters...but God.

Esther's story is my favorite. It has always been my favorite. Since I was a child, I could hear the advice Mordecai gives Esther in chapter 4 verse 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 family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.*" I've always thought of Esther as a "for just such a time as this" story. Here's what I was missing:

I may be old and my knees hurt and my back doesn't feel that great: But God placed me here for such a time as this.

My eyes don't work like they used to, I've got glasses and contacts and everything else everywhere: But God placed me here for such a time as this.

I made mistakes, plenty of mistakes, along the road to this pulpit: But God placed me here for such a time as this.

I may be tired and a little frayed around the edges: But God has placed me here for such a time as this. This is a time in which we are all called to say...but God. But God has placed me here for such a time as this.

But pastor, I'm old...But God has placed you here for such a time as this.

But pastor I had knee, hip, thigh, shoulder, hand, and brain surgery...But God has placed you here for such a time as this.

But pastor...but pastor...but pastor. But God. God has placed you here for such a time as this. Right here. Right now. This time. This place. God has a divine plan for this kin-dom and you are an essential part of it.

Here's the heart of the matter: God is speaking. God is leading. God is guiding our every footstep. Sometimes we go where God sends us...sometimes we don't. God uses us. In a high tower on top of the world...serve God. In the gutter at the bottom of society...serve God. No matter who we are, no matter where we are...God has placed us here for such a time as this. **Amen.**