

Safe or Faithful?

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[0 : 0 0] Once again we say happy Mother's Day to those of you who are mothers in so many different ways. You know biologically by adoption or spiritually you have mothered people you have mothered those around you and care for them whether you have children of your own biologically yet you are still a mother because you care and you mentor and you disciple. Thank God for all of you whatever stage you are in in your motherhood thank God for you. Father as we come to your word we ask that you would bless this message from your word that it would be what you want it to be to each one of these ladies in this room in particular. All of us must hear the word of God but in particular the ladies our mothers and sisters today. May they hear the word of the Lord and may you equip them and bless them. Use your unworthy servant in Jesus name. Amen.

The book of Esther. Most probably the most familiar passage in many ways. Chapter 4 verses 12 through 17. Hear now the word of the Lord.

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther. Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews.

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 such a time as this. Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai.

Go gather all the Jews to be found in Susa and hold a fast on my behalf. Do not eat or drink for three days night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you again praise team for leading us in song so wonderfully. Ladies, you know, this is my custom every Mother's Day to preach to you.

[3 : 0 0] Mother or not, no, whatever kind of mother you are doesn't matter to me. I'm preaching to ladies today. Mothers and sisters. And I got to tell you, I really wanted to preach a nice good fluffy feel good message to, you know, to just, you know, you go rainbows and pink stuff and you ribbons and you just go out just really, I really did. I really did. And providentially, I was led to this passage.

This passage is not rainbows and fluffy. This passage before us is a call to battle. It's a call to arms, ladies. We need, we are in need, I think, of godly women in a way that we have never needed before in this country. We are a confused people in this country. We don't even know what a real woman is anymore. It's just the way it's just that's the truth of it. We need real women of God, real women of Jesus to stand up and be faithful.

In many ways, you could say this is your moment. Whatever you're going through, you are having moments where God is calling you to stand and to express faith in him and let the chips fall where they may.

These moments, these challenges are designed to reveal where your heart is. who are you as women of God?

How are you going to stand when your moment comes or moments come? Maybe you're in one right now. Are you going to play it safe or will you be faithful to Jesus?

[5 : 1 3] You know this book. Many of you do. And so forgive me for being redundant by explaining the setting to you, but I think it's important to do that always.

How did a Jewish girl named Hadassah become Esther, queen of the Persian Empire? Remember, Esther takes place after the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, chronologically right there.

Right before the book of Job. It takes place at a time when the Jews had been allowed to return to their home under the Persian Empire.

Actually, after that return has taken place. The Persians conquered the Babylonians who had first taken the Jews into captivity from their land. You know that. But do you remember? Jeremiah the prophet told them, he told the Jewish exiles who first went into Babylon, he told them how to live once they arrived in captivity.

[6:17] Remember what he said? Jeremiah 29. This is an important passage to those of us who in particular want to do urban ministry. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons. Give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters.

Multiply there. Do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf.

For if in its welfare, you will find your welfare. And the word for welfare, shalom. Peace. God told them, yes, I'm sending you into exile, into a land that does not know me.

But I want you to get there and not try to escape. Not rebel. I want you to get there and I want you to settle down. I want you to prosper there.

[7:27] Make homes for yourselves. Even in the land of captivity. A place you don't want to be. So, when 70 years passed, as Jeremiah promised what happened, when 70 years passed and some of the Jews, the Jews were given the opportunity to go back to their homeland, all of them did not go back, right?

Many of the Jews stayed in the Persian Empire. They had made lives in that empire and they did not want to risk everything to go back to Israel, evidently.

They became Persian. The king during Esther's time, as the text tells us, what the book tells us, was Azazarius, or I'm not sure I'm pronouncing that right, but Xerxes in other places.

He had a beautiful queen named Vestai. He deposed her for standing up to him while he was drunk and wanted to parade her before his nobleman.

He was like, yeah, man, my baby, she fine, man. Y'all got to see my, you think your wife's beautiful. My wife is more beautiful than your wife. Let me go get back. Vestai, come on in here, girl, and show him your goods.

[8:43] That's the kind of thing he was doing. I'm not exaggerating. That's exactly what was going on. And Vestai didn't feel like being his trophy wife.

She was more than that. So she refused. And being the kind of king that he was, he sent her into exile.

So now he realizes later that I ain't got no woman. Well, he did have other women. He had a harem, but he needed a queen. I don't have no queen. What am I queen? I need another queen. And somebody said, oh, king, we're going to get, let's have a beauty contest nationwide.

We're going to invite all the beautiful women. No, actually not invite, by the way. We're going to go get the most beautiful women and bring them. This is not America.

This is the Persian Empire, okay? So they go out and they have this wonderful beauty contest. And you know how it goes. Hadassah, who was an orphan, being raised by her cousin, Mordecai was chosen.

[9:45] Her name, she was given a Persian name, Esther. Probably means star. But later, her cousin Mordecai angered the king's right-hand man named Haman by refusing to honor him.

Naaman, who was a descendant of the Jewish Jews' enemy, the Amalekites, was incensed. He was actually a descendant of their king, Agag, who reigned during the time of Israel's first king, Saul.

So you see what's happening here? You know, Haman's anger at the Jews may be connected to the ancestral hatred. Because he gets mad at Mordecai and it's not enough to take care of Mordecai.

He wants to wipe out all the Jews in the empire. Makes you wonder. This anti-Semitism in the extreme, but it was also spiritual warfare.

For one lady, spiritual warfare is at work here. Karen Ellis, soon-to-be Dr. Karen Ellis, in her forthcoming commentary on Esther, says this, while Haman reveals himself to be the enemy of God's people, he is not the originator of hostility against them.

[11:04] That distinction belongs to Satan himself. The architect of death and destruction. You know, Karen's here in our church. God bless her. She points out, once again, that Satan wanted to destroy, wanted to destroy as many of God's people as possible, incites this man to genocide and he gets the king to go along with it, saying that these Jewish people are causing trouble in the empire.

We got to get rid of them. That's what persecution of people groups have. That's what it does, right? It marks a people out as troublemakers and then says, we got to go after them.

The Nazis did the same thing. It's been done time and time again. Find a people in your nation who you don't like and then turn public opinion against them and go after them.

Ladies, are you with me out there, ladies? Are you hearing me? The nation there is told to annihilate the Jews all in one day.

And so the Jews go into mourning in chapter 4, verse 3. Mordecai, her cousin, goes weeping to the palace gate hoping to get Esther's attention. He wants Esther to go to the king and to see for her people.

[12:26] Because listen, no one knows that she is a Jew, y'all. Because Mordecai told her to keep it secret. I don't know why, but he did. And so they have to communicate through servants because she's in the king's harem as his queen and she just can't go anywhere she wants at any time she wants.

She explains to cousin Mordecai that the king hasn't called for her in a month. And believe me, he was not sleeping by himself. He didn't call for her in an entire month.

So she is wondering if she still has his favor. And there's a law that they have that says it promises death to anyone who just rolls up on the king without being invited.

You just didn't walk in there and say, I want an appointment. This is a defining moment in Esther's life.

Ladies, most of you will have more than one defining moment. Hers is recorded in the word of God for your instruction. What is she going to do?

[13:36] This is her moment. This is it. This is why, this is one of the reasons she, not the only, but one of the reasons she was born for this time.

How is she going to stand? I want you to notice a few things real quick. First thing, don't settle for being safe out of fear of consequences.

When God is calling, don't settle for being safe. Esther's first thought, you heard me read it in verses 12 through 14. Her first thought is not for God's people.

Her first thought is for her own well-being. She seems willing to let her people be persecuted to death, reasoning, there's nothing I can do. The king hasn't called for me.

There's nothing I can do. What's going on? She's afraid. She's afraid. Yeah, duh. First of all, notice something about Esther.

[14:41] She's been assimilated. She does not identify as a Jew, one of God's people. She's going about her duties and calling as queen in a way that is not unique as a believer in the living God.

Unlike another official a few years before her named Daniel, I think someone said Daniel, right, Daniel, no one knows her allegiance is with God because Daniel had distinguished himself in the Babylonian and Persian government service.

He was promoted above all others and in jealousy they sought to bring our boy Daniel down. You remember what was said in Daniel chapter 5, verses 3 and 5?

I mean, they really went after him wholeheartedly and hard. Then they brought...

Okay. Long passage. Daniel chapter 3. Sorry. Can't read my own writing. Oh my goodness.

[15:52] Oh. I lost my patch. I lost my page. Somebody find it for me. Their point was that Daniel, the only way they could condemn Daniel was if they found him guilty of something dealing with his God.

Because he was faithful in government service. He did everything right. He wasn't corrupt. He didn't take bribes. So what are you going to do? Find something about his religion.

Catch him. Catch him doing something in the name of God. And so they planned, they made a trap for him and they said, no one is to pray to anyone, to anyone, to any other God other than the king.

And so they found Daniel praying in his place three times a day as he always did, turning toward Jerusalem. He's praying and then they catch him praying. It was in relation to faithfulness to God that they could trap him.

That is not Esther's testimony, though. That's not her testimony. So ladies, how do you identify as a follower of Christ in your various callings?

[17 : 05] How do you identify? Do you identify? Secondly, Mordecai was asking her to risk death. She's assimilated. She wasn't identifying.

And now, keep in mind, and I said it earlier, she was, yeah, she's risking death. And let's be honest, that's not easy. She's gripped by fear. The king had already deposed one uppity wife named Vashti. She thought to herself, so he made an example of her and banished her and now you want me to go to the same man that banished my predecessor.

You want me to go to the same man. Remember, she wouldn't come when he called and now you want me to go when he hasn't called. Either way, you're asking me to do something that's incredibly risky, Mordecai.

He had mercy on Vashti, but if he's not happy with me, I'm dead. Mordecai sees where this is going.

[18 : 10] This is a huge challenge to her. That challenge is profound. Man, cousin Mordecai don't play. I mean, this guy, he has no mercy. He goes right in on her and just simply tells her, don't think your position in the palace is going to save you.

Don't think because you know somebody. Don't think because you're connected. Don't think that way because you have human connections that you will be spared because when they find out you're a Jew, they come in for you too.

That's what he's saying to her. The king ain't going to protect you because he signed it with his signet ring, which means it's the law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be changed. It has to happen. Esther was, she can't, he's saying, don't think you're safe. But then he switches gears.

In the middle of talking to her, he switches gears and says, but we will be delivered. You just said a minute ago, it's like, I think Mordecai had a moment of increased faith.

[19 : 23] His faith grew as he's communicating back and forth with Esther and he says, listen, we're going to be delivered. He's remembering maybe the faithfulness of God even when his people had been faithless.

That's called grace. It's called grace, ladies. Many of the people had gone back to Israel to rebuild the walls of the city of Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

He knew that was because of God's faithfulness. It was a sign that God was still committed to his people, to his covenant. Even though his people had messed up, God was still faithful.

Do you know that, ladies? Even though they had made mistakes, even though you have made mistakes yourself, even though you have not been as faithful maybe as you would have hoped in your life to the Lord, yet if you belong to him because of his faithfulness, he will not turn away from being faithful to you.

Mordecai was thinking on, was banking on God being consistent. That's a good thing, y'all. Maybe he said, he didn't bring us this far to leave us.

[20 : 34] He doesn't mention God. The whole book doesn't mention God by name. The entire book. There's no other book in the Bible like it. God's name is not mentioned.

But yet, because we know the scriptures, we know God is on his mind. He's telling Esther, don't play it safe, girl. Ladies, the world might tell you, don't stick your neck out.

You got too much to lose. What about your family? Listen, what are you afraid of losing if you follow Jesus? This is your moment, maybe. What are you afraid of losing?

But God is calling you. And playing it safe is not safe. You've heard me say it before, but I believe it's so true.

We've seen it. The safest place to be in a raging storm is not trying to row by yourself.

[21 : 37] The safest place to be in a raging storm is with Jesus. It's with him. Wherever he's calling you, that's the safest place to be.

Second, recognize that you are just where God put you for his glory. Mordecai puts this as a question, but I think he is calling her to think.

He wants us to really think about what he is saying. Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

It's a question, but it's a penetrating question. It's a question that goes to your heart. It's a question that says, listen, listen, listen, I know. Mordecai's like saying, I think he's saying, I know why you're there.

You see, he understood that God is not only the master of time, but the master of timing too. We speak of providence as Christians. We don't talk about luck or chance.

[22 : 45] There's no such thing as luck or chance. We live under the smiling providence of God. He is ordering all events, even our freedom. freedom or lack thereof to bring about his purposes.

Is it a coincidence she grew up to be very beautiful? Is it a coincidence a new queen was needed? Is it a coincidence Esther won that beauty contest?

Is it a coincidence she is queen and a Jew when her people are about to be murdered? Coincidence? Luck? Chance?

Are you kidding me? The invisible hand of God is over all of the situation and her moment.

Theologians speak of something called a kairos moment.

It's one of those words in the New Testament used to mean time. Again, Dr. Ellis says it this way.

Kairos, speaking of the kairos moment.

[23 : 45] The Greek word for the right or opportune moment or appointed time in God's purposes when he will act significantly to bring together his appointed combination of divine power, purpose, prophecy, promise, and fulfillment.

moment. This is a kairos moment. That moment, that significant moment where God has brought you to a spot and a place that he's going to do something magnificent, something powerful and profound in you and through you that will change things and show his glory.

I say we have many of those ladies. You've had a few already. I'm sure if you've lived any length of, any real length of time, you've had a few. So that's best back up.

Choosing where to go to college if you went. Choosing to move away from home to Chattanooga or some other city. Choosing who to marry or who not to marry. Choosing to confront someone who really hurt you maybe.

How about some of these? Maybe even right now, a classmate, if you are young, is being bullied. What do you do? A classmate being bullied.

[25 : 00] You see it. You know it. What do you do? It may cost you to intervene. What do you do? A Christian co-worker is being unfairly treated because they are a Christian and you know it.

What do you do? Your company is cheating people and you know they're cheating people. What do you do? You made a mistake.

You were in leadership and you made a mistake. but you can avoid blame by throwing people under the bus. What do you do? You made a mistake disciplining your child.

You thought they were guilty and they weren't. What do you do? Moments. Moments of decision. Moments to have an impact trust on people, on your life. God has put you there. Remember last week? You've been sent.

[26 : 07] You've been sent there. Our Lord Jesus himself moved in those Kairos moments as we've already seen in the Gospel of John. They wanted to kill Jesus but they couldn't because the Bible says it wasn't his time.

the cross, the most significant moment in human history was timed by heaven. Even our Lord's coming to earth was timed. Galatians 4 says but when the fullness of time had come, God, listen, the fullness of time had come.

God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons. Ladies, yourself, everything about the life of Christ and even your salvation was timed.

If Christ's life and work to make us his sons was timed by God, certainly your moments and circumstances are under his timing too. You've been called and sent into God's kingdom for such a time as this.

In America, for such a time as this. In Chattanooga, for such a time as this. in your place of work or school and home for such a time as this.

[27 : 23] Jesus has made you significant for him. No matter what the naysayers may say, God is using you in his kingdom which is more important than America.

How has God gifted you to serve in church, home, and vocation? How has he gifted you? Is there anything hindering you from serving in this moment?

Is there anything? Bring it to Jesus. If you're trying to understand this moment in your life, number three, then humbly seek God's favor and ask others to stand with you.

If you're in that place when you don't know what to do and you're just trying to listen, get folk to pray and fast with you. Why are you listening to Oprah?

Who are you listening to? This is the most important thing that Esther did in this passage when she said, Mordecai, you tell all the Jews you know to fast and pray for three days.

[28 : 34] Don't y'all touch nothing. I don't want nothing to pass your lips. No water, no food, nothing. And me and my handmaids, me and my girls, we're going to do the same thing and we're going to get ready for this thing.

We're going to, again, God's name is not mentioned but when you're fasting in the Bible, prayer goes with that. I have to assume that prayer went with this and you were talking to the Heavenly Father.

Ladies, I got to keep moving fast here but listen, if you are facing a Kairos moment, how are you preparing for it? Whom are you listening to?

Are you listening for the voice of God or are you too busy running to other voices? Are the people you are getting advice from listening to God and pointing you to Him?

We listen to the wrong folks sometimes because we're not listening for the voice of God, ladies.

Whose voice are you listening for right now? And lastly, trust God with your destiny as you act in faith.

[29 : 44] Add that to the line as you act in faith. Esther believes she's going to die, likely. You got to understand that.

When she says, if I perish, I'm going in after we finish this fast. If I perish, I perish. It's likely a statement of resignation more than faith.

But I think faith is there. Jesus, our Lord, says you only need a faith the size of a mustard seed and you can make mountains move. Because it isn't the size of the faith that is most important, though we should seek to grow our faith by getting to know Jesus better and his word, certainly.

But more, it's the size of the object of our faith that matters most. And ladies, nothing is bigger than Jesus. He is bigger than the mountain that stands before you.

He's bigger than the moment you're in right now that is maybe agonizing you and you're trying to...

Or if you're not there, you will be, believe me. Just keep living. You're going to have that moment and moments.

[30 : 53] And just remember this message that he is bigger. He's bigger than that. Don't bail now. Don't play it safe now. Understand, God, ladies, wants faith, not resignation.

He wants faith-filled submission to his will, not, I can't win, so I just give up. That's resignation. I ain't nothing I can do.

Sometimes it gets there. I understand that, but that's not faith. He wants you to trust him because you know that he loves you and he won't leave you and he accepts you.

He wants you to know that because he died for you. He died to make you his own. You are God's woman now. You belong to him and he's not going to turn his back on you.

He wants you to remember that and trust him so that, Lord, so that in this moment when you are being tested and your back is up against the wall that you'll know that your God has not forsaken you.

[31 : 58] He wants you to have that deep in your soul. He's at work. He wants you to remember and hold to the fact that he's at work for your good even in the messiness of this moment.

Faith is greater than resignation. Hebrews 11, 6, you know this verse. Without faith, it is impossible to please him for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Ladies, faith draws near to God. Faith pleases God because faith trusts him. That's what God wants from you. He's not asking you to move the mountain yourself.

He's not asking you to jump high, jump over high mountain, high buildings and leap, you know, and be Supergirl. He's not calling you to be Wonder Woman. He's calling you to trust him.

He's not asking you to be eternally youthful looking like these Hollywood crazies. He's not asking, he's calling you to trust him even as you age.

[33 : 14] Our culture has done a number on us. Will you say from your heart that because you belong to Jesus, here it is, God is for me. Romans 8, who can be against me?

Will you write that on your heart? Will you stand before your mirror and look and tell the devil, God is for me, who can be against me? If you can't do that, why not?

What's keeping you from believing that? What's keeping you from believing that God is for you? If you have put your faith in Jesus, what's keeping you from believing that God is for you?

That's something you need to lay again before him. Because we all struggle, don't we? In this moment, saints, here it is. In this moment, Esther becomes the spiritual mother of her people. because like any true mother, she's willing to die for her children. She's willing to go to bat. She will do whatever it takes to make sure her children are cared for.

[34 : 19] That's a mother. mother. Mother. Mother. Mother. Mother. Mother. We keep seeing in the newspaper mothers sacrificing their children. Literally, killing them. That's not mothers.

Those are not mothers. That's destruction. That's something that's gone wrong inside of these ladies that's corrupted their insides. They need help.

They need the Lord. Listen, but a true mother, spiritual mother, in Esther's case, a true mother will go to bat for her children and stand in the gap. And say, you got to go through me to get to them. She's going to go before the king of Persia. Ladies, faith is risky at times. Faith is risky at times. Hold on to that.

It's true. But God is not pleased without it. He longs for his daughters to trust him. Faith is what glorifies him. Remember, Dan, your earlier, what happened to him when he, in his faith, he stood his ground.

[35 : 22] He ended up in a lion's den. He was about to become lion chowder. God delivered him. And oftentimes, he will deliver you, ladies, in the midst of that.

He will deliver you from the fangs. But, sometimes, he wills that we experience victory by dying for his glory.

Sometimes, you have to pay the cost. Revelation 12, 11, one of my favorite verses in the Bible. They conquered him. That is the dragon. By the blood of the Lamb, the blood of Jesus. By the word of their testimony. Faithful to testify of him and hold fast to following him.

Watch this. For they love not their lives even unto death. Sometimes, you glorify God by dying. And it doesn't mean you lost.

[36 : 31] It means you won. It means you won. God's people are sometimes persecuted to death. Spiritually, figuratively speaking, maybe, or sometimes literally.

When we take a stand in God's name, pray for your brothers and sisters, ladies, pray for your brothers and sisters who are taking a stand for the name of Jesus and risking their literally lives. Pray for them. Pray for your brothers and sisters who are taking their stand for Jesus in corporate America, in academia, in different parts of this country, who are taking a stand for Jesus and putting their jobs on the line.

That's real, y'all. Don't be indifferent and recognize that he may call you to do the same. He may call you to do the same.

Esther almost missed her moment, but by the grace of God, she did. Take advantage of your moments in the name of Jesus.

[37 : 43] They are many. Some more than others, but there are moments take advantage of them in the name of Jesus. Listen, saints, Esther was gripped by fear, and fear is real because we're human beings.

There's good fear, the fear of the Lord. There's natural fear, the fear of danger, but sometimes the fear of danger can crawl over into a sinful fear where we will dishonor Jesus or back away from Jesus because of the consequences we are afraid will happen if we walk with him through this. that's the fear you want to avoid. What causes fear? Elise Fitzpatrick, Janie Street writing in Elise Fitzpatrick's book on counseling women, women counseling women, says five things, and I just want to, you can take a, if you have a camera on your phone, just take a picture of these questions, the five questions.

What captivates my thoughts when I'm tempted to fear? What captivates your thoughts? In what ways do you allow fear to paralyze you and keep you from fulfilling your God-given responsibilities? What are you tempted to succumb to? When, what, what, what I am tempted to succumb to sinful fear? What is my heart craving more than Jesus? That should be when, not what, when I am tempted.

[39 : 05] Are there ways I have sought to manipulate others or control others because of my fears? You ask yourselves those questions?

Will you think about those? When am I believing about God when I'm afraid? Are you, will you think about that? Because when your moment comes, you need to know who you are, a child of God, through faith in Jesus.

Is that you? You need to know that the king and kingdom you serve are greater than this world's king and kingdom. You need to know that. Fear not. Know this moment and your destiny are in the loving hands of your Savior which will lead you to your knees and to pray.

And then when you get finished praying, stand and go in the name of Jesus. This is your moment, but it's his moment with you.

Father, help us. Help my sisters, my mothers and my sisters as they faced their many different trials throughout this land.

[40 : 19] Oh God, help them to stand in your name and stand for your glory. Lord, deliver them from fear. Father, may they hear your voice.

This is the way, walk ye in it. And may they follow and may you bless them and use them. We need them, use them for your glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.