

Such a Time as This

Esther 4:15-17 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ “Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Introduction

Today I am going to begin my sermon with the story of a brave woman in the Old Testament who changed the history of Jewish nation. Her name is Esther. I am sure many of you heard of her name before. She was the Jewish queen of a Persian king Ahasuerus. The story in the Bible goes on like this: One day, Haman, the king's chief adviser and the second-in-command was passing through the town of Susa. Everyone bowed down to show their respect, except one whose name was Mordecai. Mordecai happened to be a Jew and was also Queen Esther's cousin and guardian, which Haman didn't know. Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him greatly offended Haman. By the way, this thing happened because of Mordecai's faith in the LORD (that is, you bow down to no human, but only to the LORD). Haman wanted to kill Mordecai, but after discovering that he was a Jew, Haman wanted to kill, not just Mordecai, but all the Jews in the kingdom. He even secured the king's permission to do so on a certain day. Such dreadful news came to Mordecai's attention. What do you think he would do? Immediately, he contacted his cousin in the palace.

He asked her to do something about Haman's plot against the Jews. Esther replied, “All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.” ¹² They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

¹³ Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And **who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?**”

¹⁵ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶ “Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and

if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him”(Esther 4:11-17).

Well, to make the long story short, Esther was able to foil the enemy’s plot. She and all the Jews in Susa fasted three days. God led the king to reverse his decree. Not only were all the Jews spared but they also killed their enemies all over his kingdom on the day when Haman’s order was to go into effect. This is the background for Purim, one of the Jewish festivals, typically observed in February or March. The punchline? God saved His people because they sought His face with fasting in time of crisis.

Content

You may wonder why I am bringing up Esther’s story? Here’s why: We need God’s special favor on our nation. We need His healing of our land. Many of us live daily with anxiety and fear. Most of us would agree that the times we are living in now are very treacherous. COVID-19 to begin with. Political divisions, social unrest, or even financial struggles. We are very much afraid of the uncertain future. Period.

So, how do we deal with these challenges? Some of us look up to our political leaders to turn the tides around. Others hope that somehow both the next President and the Congress will pull us out of this mess after the election. More others hope that the vaccine will make all things back to normal, even for good.

Really? Do we honestly believe those I mentioned above are the solution to our problems today? With all due respect, I beg to differ. It would be naïve of us if we trust in our political leadership. It has disappointed us time and time again since its inception. Study history. It will tell you one thing: man is not trustworthy. *Who can find a trustworthy man?* God’s Word declares (Proverbs 20:6). In fact, God’s Word has been telling us for ages that we do have a better option: *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.* ⁹*It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes* (Psalm 118:8-9). *Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation* (Psalm 146:3).

Furthermore, many systems in our society (education, health care, social security) are broken and require a lot of fixing and repair that, in turn, requires sacrifice and discipline on our part that few of us would like to make. E.g. One member shared her thoughts with me on school systems. She said, *“About 60% of my property taxes goes to school system. By now, we should’ve created many geniuses in our country. Where are they?”*

We are in such a mess. The reason why I talk about Esther is because her story points out the directions where we need to go in such a time as this. We need God. We need His special intervention. How do we get it? By going to Him in humility. By prayer and fasting.

If we do the same as Queen Esther and her people did, who knows? God may do a miracle for our nation. If we do fast and pray as a group, if we humbly seek God and His

face, I believe God will forgive us our sins and heal our land. Like He promised in 2 Chronicles 7:14. ¹⁴ *and My people who are called by My name **humble themselves and pray** and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

That phrase, **to humble yourself and pray**—is referring to fasting. Most of us are unfamiliar with fasting and we rarely practice it. But fasting is designed by God and practiced by God’s people for thousands of years. It effectively served God’s people and delivered them from their dire situations time and time again.

E.g. 1. When the enemies of Judah (the kings of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir—modern day Syria and Jordan) invaded his kingdom, King Jehoshaphat knew his army was no match to them. In front of such crisis, the king proclaimed a national fast throughout his kingdom (2 Chronicles 20:3). All the people in Judah, old and young, fasted and sought God’s face. The result? The LORD Himself fought on behalf of Judah and utterly destroyed the enemies (2 Chronicles 20:23). Their corporate fasting moved the heart and hands of the Lord Almighty who did a miracle for His people.

E.g. 2. When the Israelites first returned to their homeland after 70 years of exile in Babylon, they were small and weak. On the way to Jerusalem, their enemies were mighty and galore. Ezra and his people fasted and humbled themselves before the Lord asking for His protection. The Lord listened to their entreaty and kept them safe (Ezra 8:21, 23).

E.g. 3. Nehemiah, another leader of the remnants who returned to Israel: He and his people fasted before God confessing their sins (Nehemiah 9:1). The Lord helped them to thwart the enemy’s threat.

E.g. 4. Remember Jonah? The guy who ran away from God disobeying His command? Eventually he went to Nineveh and declared God’s message; the message of doom to the city. Listen yourself to the Word of God. Jonah, chapter 3, verse 4:

⁴ *Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”*

⁵ *Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. ⁶When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. ⁷He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. ⁸But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹**Who knows**, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.”*

¹⁰ When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it (Jonah 3:4-10).

Why am I talking about fasting? Because when we humble ourselves before God, repent our sins, and seek His face, He will forgive our sins and heal our land. I want to see the LORD do that for America.

So, as pastor of this church, I declare that this coming **Wednesday, October 28**, to be **A Day of Fasting at MUMC**. I urge all of you to join me in fasting and prayer that day seeking God's face and ask the Lord to have mercy on our nation.

If you can't do it on Wednesday but can do it another day, please do so. But be sure to do one day of fasting during the next nine days until the day of election.

Now, here's how we are going to do it. Those who are able to do fasting, start fasting right after dinner on Tuesday evening and skip breakfast and lunch on Wednesday and end the fast with dinner on Wednesday night. E.g. Dinner at 6 p.m. Break the fast at 6 p.m. on the next day. Shun solid food yet drink plenty of water during that time.

Those who are unable to do it for medical reasons, consider doing it in three days; skip one meal a day for three days and pray. Encourage your children to participate, too. Remember the city of Nineveh? Even the animals took part. That made the difference. You can also do a fasting with no solid food yet drinking clear juice, either apple juice or grape juice (this works well for children and youth). Those who cannot do any of these options, please join us in daily prayers using the daily pointers in your bulletin.

One thing you will find out while you fast: you have plenty of time when you don't eat. Use those hours to repent, pray, read God's Word and pray more. On behalf of our nation. On behalf of our family. On behalf of our church.

Once again, the key is that as God's people and as the concerned citizens of America, we seek God's face on behalf of our nation. Some of you may wonder what difference our prayer and fasting would make when our number is so small. Do not rely on the sheer number. Elijah fought alone against 450 false prophets. But he had God on his side. That's what matters. His prayer moved God's heart and hands. That's what we need now.

Conclusion

This is not the time for finger pointing at others for our problems. This is not the time for fear or running away from our challenges. We confront fears, anxieties, and uncertain future with head on. With God's help, of course. It is time for us to humble ourselves with fasting, repent our sins, and seek God's face. Who knows, in such a time as this, the Lord may have mercy on our nation. Remember October 28. Amen.