

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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Esther's Lesson on Proclaiming the Gospel

Esther 4:13-17

Prayer: *Father, we do thank you for who you are, we thank you for what you have given to us in your word, the gift that it is. We thank you for this body, Lord, that you have called together these many years and we just, again, acknowledge that your Holy Spirit is what keeps us together, your Holy Spirit is who instructs us. And so we pray this morning as we again open up your book that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would give us the ability to make sense of what you are presenting here in your book and that it may be of permanent value. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are back at the story of Esther. I guess if there's anything that I would want you to take away from the last six times that we've looked at this book, it's to understand the book of Esther in context with the war that started in the garden of Eden between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It's a war that's ongoing, it's a war that's going to continue until Christ returns. And the first part of that war was directed at

preventing Jesus Christ from being able to take on flesh and become God incarnate. And to do that, the head of the kingdom of darkness, the one that was referred to by Jesus as the prince of this world, well, he sought constantly to destroy the Jews, knowing that Jesus would come from their line. Esther is just one of a series of stories describing how God's sovereign, yet invisible, hand protected and kept the Jews from destruction so that Jesus could be born of Mary.

And so we're picking up on the story of Esther when the edict for the destruction of the Jews has been just issued. I want to revisit Mordecai's encounter at the palace gate. We have Mordecai, he's dressed in sackcloth and ashes, he's screaming in agony and he's stopped at the public gate and he's come to this gate with this desperate case that he's trying to lay out before his cousin Esther who is now the queen of Persia. Mordecai has learned that on one given day some twelve months from that day, every citizen of Persia is to take up arms to -- quote -- "kill, annihilate and destroy" any Jew they knew as associate, friend or colleague. It basically meant the annihilation of all Jews from Persia. This was a place that Mordecai and Esther once thought of as safe. I mean, both Mordecai and Esther had achieved much in this new home of theirs. They were part of this vast movement of Jews that were driven out of Israel and into Persia after Israel suffered a

stunning defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. And for a long period of time they'd been able to hide their Jewish identity and prosper in this new pagan culture that they found themselves in, but all that changed in an instant when Mordecai saw what the edict commanded. He got it. He understood that once again Israel was under attack. The kingdom of darkness had a simple plan, just eliminate the Jews before Jesus could even be born. And both sides had their champions, I mean, the kingdom of light had Mordecai and Esther, and the kingdom of darkness had Haman and they had the king. Haman was the second most powerful man in all of Persia, a man whose very presence required everyone to bow. Well, everyone did bow with the exception of one man, and that man was Mordecai. Revenge for Mordecai's refusal to bow became Haman's obsession. He was an ego-driven man, and the idea of somebody refusing to bow to him incensed him to the point where he was able to convince the king that Mordecai and his fellow Jews were a people group that should no longer be allowed in Persia. Well, the king was so indifferent, so uncaring that he agreed to Haman's plan, not even realizing that he was condemning his queen Esther in doing so. He didn't realize it but she, too, was a Jew. And so the edict is read and Mordecai goes to the only place where he feels he has any hope of survival, and that is to the palace itself to his cousin Esther who is now queen, and he explains what's happening to her eunuch. And Esther communicates back to Mordecai the dilemma that

she finds herself in in *Esther 4:11*. It says this: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law -- to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days." See, Esther understands all too well the nature of her husband, the king, and this is a man who's famous for his instability, famous for his brutality. She tells Mordecai she hasn't had any contact with the king for at least a month and there's a death penalty for anybody associated to anybody who just walks into his presence. And he replies in *Esther 4:13*: "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, and 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. This is one of the most amazing paragraphs in all of scripture. You know, one of the

things that's been stated repeatedly about the book of Esther is that there's no mention of God anywhere in this particular book. There's barely a reference at all to God. And yet here in this paragraph without any direct reference to God is three of the most iconic statements ever made about the nature of faith and the nature of the gospel itself. In this one paragraph alone God reveals three basic principles of spiritual warfare that govern God's victory over the enemy and that also apply to us in how we share the gospel.

God shows us in this paragraph first that the gospel is mission critical; second, that it is time sensitive; and third, that it is recklessly proclaimed. So let's look at the first one. The first one is this gospel is mission critical. Well, Mordecai tells Esther, *"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place."* Okay. As we look at the statement, we understand Mordecai's referring -- first of all, he's referring to the existential threat that he and his people are experiencing. And what he's telling Esther is that should she decide to protect herself, well, then relief and deliverance are just going to come from some other place. The obvious fact is that there is no other place for relief to come from than God. And what is unsaid but clearly implied is that the protection of the Jews was a mission critical undertaking. And that means that nothing,

nothing is more important than the mission itself. If Esther fails at the mission by abandoning the Jews, then God's going to simply find another way of delivering them. Well, we understand the principle he was speaking of is critical to understanding the nature of the gospel. At its most basic level, it, too, is mission critical. See, we, too, have been given the privilege of knowing Christ. We've also been given the responsibility of telling a lost world that God himself became one of us, that he lived out a flawless life, that he went to the cross in order to exchange his perfection for our imperfection. We get to tell the world that by placing their faith in Christ's death on the cross they, too, can stand before a perfect God, made by Christ's perfection now worthy of heaven itself. There's nothing more important in our entire lives than that the mission of glorifying God by proclaiming his gospel goes forward, and the mission itself is described by Christ who says in *Matthew 28* says: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Mordecai's words to Esther says: *"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place,"* well they reveal to us the mission critical nature of God's interaction with man as we present the gospel. You see, if we don't obey God's command to share the gospel, then relief and

deliverance for that person will come from another place.

Let me give you an example of what mission critical means when it comes to sharing the gospel. I mean we understand that God has called us to the task of proclaiming the gospel even though we know we are speaking the truth to folks who are just like we were at one point, folks who were spiritually dead, folks who were children of wrath incapable of -- on their own of responding. You know, those words describe me perfectly before I came to Christ. I was completely dead, absolutely indifferent to the claims of Christ, filled with a wrath towards God that I couldn't begin to grasp or even understand. And I'd heard the gospel multiple times but it never penetrated a micron into my spirit. Never until by the grace of God he made that gospel come alive and suddenly what had been utter foolishness became absolute lifesaving wisdom. That's what God's Holy Spirit does, but he does it through us. Two of the most important persons in my entire life to this day, they probably have no idea whatsoever the affect they had on my life, and here's why they don't know.

Let me give you a little background about myself. When I first got out of college I had a degree in English and I had decided three-quarters of the way through school that I really wanted to pursue science. So I decided to go to Michigan State to pursue a second

degree in wildlife biology and that required that I take a whole bunch of hard sciences that I had never taken before, like organic chemistry and genetics, statistics and the like and so I spent an entire year immersed in the study of science in order to gain enough hard science credits to get into graduate school. After a year, I had accumulated enough of those credits so Janice and I left Michigan, we moved to Vermont and I worked as a carpenter while I applied to different graduate schools. I eventually wound up getting accepted in San Francisco State University to study behavioral biology. And actually, believe it or not, this was 40 years ago, I wanted to study sharks, and this was pre Jaws, so I needed to find a place that was on the coast. I also think it's pretty obvious to people that I am not a behavioral biologist. See, I wound up abandoning my career pursuit halfway into my master's because we had two kids and money was extremely tight, the field that I had chosen had very little economic value. In fact the primary market for the degree that I was shooting for was teaching. So I went to an advisor and my advisor told me that, look, for every single teaching job, there's about 150 applicants. So I reluctantly gave up my pursuit in order to simply be able to make a living, which I was doing as a cabinetmaker. Now just to place where we were spiritually, Janice and I were at this time complete pagans when I got accepted to graduate school. We both got miraculously saved on our way out to California, me in Michigan

at the house of a friend that I had met in Michigan State, Janice somewhere on her own in Colorado about a month later. That's another whole story in and of itself. But we both arrived in San Francisco as brand new Christians. And if you had told me 43 years ago what I would be doing today, I would have either laughed in your face or fainted. See, many a times after I had given up this dream of becoming a behavioral biologist, I wondered why in the world would God lead me on such a wild goose chase of spending an entire year in Michigan studying sciences that I would never use? I mean I thought of all those nights of studying, the sacrifice that Janice had made allowing me to be a full time student while she worked as a nursing instructor, and I thought what was all of that about? That was all for what? Well, God let me know in no uncertain terms exactly what it was for. Two different people entered very briefly into my life and then left while I was in Michigan. One was a door-to-door salesman, the other was an electrician who had been sent to my apartment to do some repairs. And I had offered them on two very separate occasions a cup of coffee and it just so happens that both of them took the time and effort while we were sitting around to present the gospel to me. And both of them to this day have absolutely no idea what that presentation of the gospel did in my life. I was polite, I was respectful to both of them but I told them in no uncertain terms, I'm just not buying your gospel, okay? It literally took me years

later to realize that each of these men, by being faithful and by proclaiming the gospel, were being powerfully used by God to move me closer and closer to the kingdom such that when I finally came to know the truth of the gospel, I was able to kind of put the dots together and realize how profound an effect, how mission critical those presentations of the gospel were to me. I mean two of the first people that I plan on looking up when I get to heaven is that door-to-door salesman and that electrician, neither of whom had the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts to give me the gospel were anything but fruitless. I mean I now know that God had, for reasons known only to him, chosen to give me the gift of the gospel. I also know that in God's economy, sending me for another state for an entire year to study something I would never ever use in any practical way was just a means to get the actual reason for why I wound up in Michigan, and that was to have two conversations with those two men. Now would God send me on that far of a wild goose trip for that? Absolutely. Those two men never realized that they had been sent on a mission critical task to present me with the gospel. And on one level you could claim, well, they failed at that task because I rejected their gospel, but God would not be denied, and so he raised up another and another. One was my own brother and another was a university professor who was at the house in Michigan where I got saved, a guy who challenged my assertions until the Holy Spirit just cracked my spirit wide open.

But that's how a mission critical operation works. I thought the most important thing in the world was my studies and my academics in getting into graduate school but God thought otherwise. And because my getting the gospel was mission critical, God had no problem whatsoever sending Janice and me on a one-year detour just so that those two people could speak to me and deliver the good news. Now if that electrician and that book salesman had decided to keep silent instead of opening their mouths, I'm absolutely convinced that relief would have come to me from another place, because God will never allow his will to be frustrated by our failings. And again as Mordecai put it to Esther, he says: *"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place."* Mordecai tells Esther that if she fails at her God-given task, God will simply find another way to get the job done. Mission critical means the mission itself is what matters. And God will do whatever needs to be done to get that mission accomplished. I mean in the case of Esther it was the salvation of the Jewish nation. In my case it was my own personal salvation. If God has given you the task of giving somebody the good news and you fail at it either through fear or indifference or laziness, then I'm absolutely convinced that relief and deliverance for that person will rise from another place. Now I realize those are dangerous words to speak but they're true. For some it will seem like an invitation to stay silent and do nothing about the

gospel, but after all, if I choose not to speak out, then God's going to pick somebody else. You know, there's a reason why people call reformed people "the frozen chosen." That's because many have taken the notion that it is God alone who's able to move people to understand and accept the gospel and then just off-loaded the responsibility from people to God. R.C. Sproul was once confronted by a student who asked him what motive do I have for sharing the gospel if I believe that God's the one who's doing all of the choosing and only those who God chooses are going to respond? And Sproul said, "I don't know, maybe the fact that the king of the universe commands that you share the gospel might have something to do with it." That's really the point. I mean I think it's very easy to lose sight of what we are here for. We are here to glorify God by proclaiming this gospel and advancing his kingdom, and there is nothing more important than the kingdom of God and there's no privilege higher or greater or more important than sharing what God has done in our lives for the purpose of advancing his kingdom.

Not only is the proclamation of the gospel mission critical just as Esther's proclamation to the king was but it's also time sensitive. Again, we go back to *Esther 4:14*, it says: "*And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" It was the winter of 1971 and Michigan is incredibly cold in the wintertime, and I heard a knock on the door and I opened it up to

find this semi-frozen door-to-door salesman. I told him right off the bat that I was a student, I had no time and no money, that he had no chance whatsoever of selling me anything. And he just immediately abandoned his pitch and he said, "Hey, I get it," he said, "I'm freezing. Can I come in and get warm?" I said, "Sure." I said, "Would you like a cup of coffee?" And what followed was a conversation that eventually led to my need for Jesus Christ. And again, you know, I remember very little of the details except that I very politely but firmly said, look, I am just not interested in that stuff at all. I literally never gave a moment's thought to that conversation until years later when I realized how incredibly important in my life it was. My guess is that that book salesman thought that day was a complete and total waste, he'd been trudging through ice and snow going door to door, getting nowhere, probably thinking what a waste this job was, and what he really had no idea was that he had come into the kingdom to this funky little duplex in East Lansing, Michigan, for such a time as this. It's not that different from Mordecai's situation. Mordecai was desperate to impress on Esther that the fact that nothing had happened in their lives by chance. He wanted her to recognize that her meteoric rise from captured slave to queen in all of Persia just possibly had a timestamp on it. What he was trying to get her to see was that there was far greater power working behind the screens orchestrating what seemed to be appearing strictly by chance. I

see very little difference between the earth shattering consequences of Esther's response and the earth shattering, at least to me, consequence of that book salesman's decision to speak. See, the bottom line for us is this. We live in this culture, in this place, in this time, under the exact same circumstance that Mordecai and Esther lived in with regard to God's invisible hand. And we need to understand that everything, and I do mean everything, is geared and pointed towards *Romans 8:28: All things do work together for good to those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose.* Everything flows from the invisible hand of a God who is capable of superintending every intention of every human being regardless whether it's well intentioned or absolutely evil. And every one of us is going to be given multiple opportunities to recognize that for God and his kingdom, absolutely nothing happens by chance. God has designed each and every circumstance uniquely for who we are, for where we are, for what God wants to do through us. Esther's confrontation with the king came because she recognized that all of the seemingly random events in her life all pointed towards one specific major event. She had been kidnapped and chosen and made queen for such a time as this. You and I need to recognize that nothing happens by chance in our lives as well, and when an opportunity presents itself to share the good news, we, too, need to understand that we, too, were created for such a time as that.

Finally, we arrive at Esther's response. In verse 16 she said:
"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and 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."

Esther's response completes the trifecta of responses that represent the gospel that we've been entrusted with. I mean first, that the gospel is mission critical; second, that the gospel is time sensitive; and third, we see it is to be recklessly proclaimed. It's to be given without any thought of the consequences. I mean as Esther puts it, "If I perish, I perish."

I once read a story about an Iranian evangelist who had been arrested, and he's sitting in his jail cell and he's awaiting his execution. And he claimed in this article that during the night he had a dream, and in that dream Jesus came to speak to him. You know, I've heard that there are places where there's no Bible and where the Bible is impossible to find that many, many people, particularly Muslims have come to know Jesus through dreams. I don't see that happens in this country where you can get a Bible just about anywhere, but in cultures who have no scriptures, it just might mean that God uses dreams to connect with his people. So as this pastor says, Jesus appears to him in his dream and he asks him how he's doing, and he says he's frantically telling Jesus

that he's been faithful in sharing his gospel and because of his faithfulness he's been arrested, he's been tried and he's been found guilty, and now he's going to be executed and he said Jesus' response in the dream was, "So?" So? He said Jesus was completely non-plussed. I's almost as Jesus was saying, "What's the big deal?" In fact Jesus seems to have that same kind of attitude when he's telling the disciples what they should expect in the end times. This is what he said in *Matthew 24*. He said: *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."* You look at that say, well, was Jesus just being heartless or was he simply being realistic with the perspective that he has and we don't. I'm sure if I was that pastor sitting in that jail cell awaiting my execution, I'd be a lot less than sanguine about my immediate future as he was. I mean, we can't help but to cling to the only life that we know, and that's this one that we have right now. But Jesus wants us to view our lives with an almost reckless abandon when it comes to the gospel because he knows exactly what the stakes are and what limitless freedom is ours when we're willing to relax our grip on this life alone. Again, Jesus made it quite clear when he said in *Matthew 10*: *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* So we ask, okay, how do we do that? Well, simply put, we take our focus off this world and we put it squarely on the world to come.

Look what Esther says. Esther says: *"If I perish, I perish."* She said that because she had no other options. But understand, having no other options but God's kingdom is about as liberated as you can get. There's an old Kris Kristofferson song that has a great line in it because it's absolutely true. The line says, "Freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose." Esther knew that freedom exactly. There was literally nothing left to lose. It's the same freedom that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced when they refused to bow down and worship the idol that Nebuchadnezzar had put forward. Remember that? In *Daniel 3:16* it says: *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."* Again, those are amazing three words, *"but if not"*. I mean those words said everything that needed to be said about the freedom that comes when you're willing to give up your most precious possession, of course that's your life. When you're willing to give that up for something more precious, and that's the kingdom of God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego told Nebuchadnezzar that God was very capable of saving them, and if he did so, that would be fine, but they also said, however, if God decides not to

save us and we burn up, that's okay, too. Either way, don't count on us worshiping your golden image. See, God's kingdom meant that much to them. Nebuchadnezzar was absolutely furious because he had held out to them the ultimate threat. He was going to take their very lives from them. They gave him back the equivalent of what Jesus said to that Iranian pastor, they said, so? When you're willing to give up the most precious thing you have because you trust that God has something even more precious, you find a freedom and a power that very few people in the entire world have ever experienced, something the persecuted church experiences all the time. If you look at life the way Jesus did, certainly if you look at life the way Paul did, it actually makes a lot of sense to be able to look at all of these scary things in life through eternity's eyes, then death is only a momentary inconvenience. It opens the door to life as it's going to be for the next trillion years or so and beyond. You see, Jesus has this huge advantage over us. I mean he knows exactly what it is and where it is we are going. It was Jesus who said in *John 14*: *"In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* You see, we see through a glass darkly and so we cling to this life. We think it's the most important thing, but it's not.

Remember what the apostle Paul said about this life that we live and the struggles that we are potentially going through? He said this in *2 Corinthians 4*, he said: *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* It needs to be noted that Paul's light and momentary afflictions included this as he laid it out in *2 Corinthians 11*. This is what happened in Paul's life. He said: *Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forth lashes less one. That's 39 times -- 39 whippings five separate times. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews, forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*

That's light and momentary to Paul. So how in the world did Paul

never lose heart? Well, the answer is simple, he never took his eyes off the kingdom. He managed to live his life recklessly proclaiming the gospel because he nurtured a split-screen view that combined an absolutely realistic view of the transient life that we live here on earth with the wonders of life in the kingdom that is unseen but eternal. It was his trust in a sovereign God and in the *Romans 8:28* vision that everything in the end is going to work out that gave Paul the strength to see a life that most of us regard as extraordinarily brutal and difficult as one of light and momentary trials. Compared to an eternity of bliss, anything in this life can seem light and momentary. And that's the point. What God says, focus in on what I have in store for you. Cling very lightly to this life and all of its trappings and I'll give you not just the life to come but this life as well. This is just what Jesus said to his disciples. They were saying what are we going to eat, what are we going to drink, what about clothing, what about living? This is what he said to them in *Matthew 6*, he said: *"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* Get your kingdom priorities straight, pour your heart out, your heart and your mind and your soul and your body into recklessly proclaiming the kingdom

of God and his glory and God promises everything else is simply going to work itself out.

A few years back I was reporting on the T4G conference we attended, and the conference, the whole idea of the conference was about recklessly proclaiming the gospel. David Platt was one of the premiere speakers. He's the one who's going to be doing Secret Church here the 26th of April, we're thrilled to see a lot of you were very interested in, but he was one of the final speakers and he was speaking about the reformers, and he gave a message entitled: "Why Reformers Died In Their Day and How We Must Live In Ours." And he spoke about men like John Rogers and Rowland Taylor and Rawlins White who all gloriously marched to their fiery deaths proclaiming the very same gospel that we believe in. Matt Chandler was there and he spoke about Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, two other believers who willingly embraced being burned at the stake rather than denying their Lord. And in every single case, these people could have escaped by simply remaining silent or recanting what they said, but they refused. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their actions said, "but if not." Like Esther's, "If I perish, I perish" but in their case they did pay the ultimate price, they did perish. Latimer and Ridley were two faithful ministers who were brought before Mary Queen of Scots for refusing to deny that salvation was by faith alone in Christ alone. They

were brought out together on stakes to be burned, and Latimer said to Ridley -- quote -- "Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out." You know what they did? They looked death in the face and they said, "So?" How do they do that? Well, they said that because, first of all, they knew where they were headed, but they also knew something else. They knew as well that they were not there alone. They said that because God was right there with them walking through it with them.

See, when you proclaim a gospel that is mission critical, time sensitive, and recklessly proclaimed, you have a promise from God, and this is God's promise. He says in *Isaiah 43*: *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* Now is God saying no one's ever going to be burned up in a fire? No. He wasn't saying that at all. In fact, hundreds of reformers met their deaths by being burned at the stake. What God was saying is that no matter what this world throws at you, I will be right there with you giving you the grace, the strength, and the power to endure it. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wound up in a furnace, they see this promise being played out literally. They

find there's literally somebody else in there with them. Three go into the fire. In *Daniel 3:25* we have Nebuchadnezzar saying: "*But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.*" This is the pre-incarnate Christ himself in the midst of the fire with them. What God did literally with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, what he does invisibly with Mordecai and Esther he does spiritually with every one of his children. He promises to walk through the worst of it with us, that none of us pass through the waters alone, that none of us walk through the fires alone. And we've seen over and over and over again that God is faithful and whether it's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego or Latimer and Ridley or Mordecai and Esther, we know that God is not going to abandon us. We all know *Psalms 23*: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

You know, I often say you don't get boiling oil grace until you're thrown into boiling oil. And we've seen time and time again that God is faithful. And when people go through super human tortures and struggles, it's because it is also they're able to do it because they're accompanied by a supernatural grace that they experience and we don't. We're not in boiling oil. Esther reached that moment in her life that was mission critical. Nothing

mattered more than the preservation of the Jewish nation that would eventually give rise to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and so Mordecai points out to her that not only is the role mission critical but it's also time sensitive when he tells her for such a time as this you've been brought into this world and into this palace.

Finally, Esther's ability to cast all caution to the wind and proceed knowing *if I perish, I perish*, is exactly what God wants from all of us. But you know, we in this country, we are not even remotely looking at losing our lives for sharing the gospel. And we might lose something, we might lose some of our standing, we might lose some of our pride, maybe at worse we might lose our job. It's highly doubtful we will ever say when it comes to the kingdom *"If I perish, I perish,"* or *"but if not,"* the question is can we say in spite of whatever threats we are facing for proclaiming the gospel that it's all good? It's all good because we know that God is sovereign, that God is in charge and that he will never let us down.

And so what I want us to ask ourselves this morning, ask ourselves can I say that? Do I believe that? Do I have the believer's mindset? And if you don't, if you'd like to have the strength, the power, and the peace that can stare at death itself and say, "So," the solution is fix your eyes on the kingdom. Fix yours eyes on

the One who alone can give you that power. Trust in the character of God. *Fear not, He says, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word, I thank you for Esther, I thank you that she was willing to say, "If I perish, I perish." And Father, again, I pray that you would give each of us the vision that for us to share the gospel is mission critical, time sensitive and needs to be radically proclaimed, not caring what the consequences are. Give us a vision, Lord, of what you would have us do. I think back to that electrician, I think back to that door-to-door salesman who had no idea the profound effect they had on my life and you have no idea, each of us, the profound effect we have on people's lives when we share the gospel, even if it gets rejected outright. Lord, I just pray you would give us first a heart that desires to serve you, a heart that says, Lord, give me the opportunity, give me the chance, one that prays ahead of time for opportunities to share the gospel and one that has the courage to share it when the time is right, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.