THE STORY CHAPTER 20

The Queen of Beauty and Courage

February 25-26, 2017

Appearing on the Big Screen…

Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites – everyone whose heart God had moved – prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

*Pg. 263; Ezra 1:5*

“All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

*Pg. 281; Esther 4:11*

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 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 your royal position for such a time as this?”

*Pg. 282; Esther 4:13-14*

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

*Pg. 282; Esther 4:16*

**God has placed you in a position of influence.**

**You must know when to keep your mouth shut.**

* In matters of preference (Romans 14:1-9)
* To people who won’t listen (Matthew 7:6)
* When you’re angry (Proverbs 15:1; James 1:19)
* Judging someone’s motive (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)
* When you don’t know what you’re talking about (Philippians 2:3)

**You must know when it is time to speak up**

Defend the weak and the fatherless;  
     uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.  
4Rescue the weak and the needy;  
     deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

*Psalm 82:3-4*

• Leviticus 19:33-34

• Leviticus 119:9-10

• Deuteronomy 10:18-19

• Ezekiel 16:49

• Exodus 23:9

• Malachi 3:5

• 1 Kings 8:41-44

• Job 31:32

• Matthew 25:25-36

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

*Leviticus 19:33-34*

“And who knows but that you have come to your position for such a time as this?”

*Esther 4:14*

THE STORY CHAPTER 20

The Queen of Beauty and Courage

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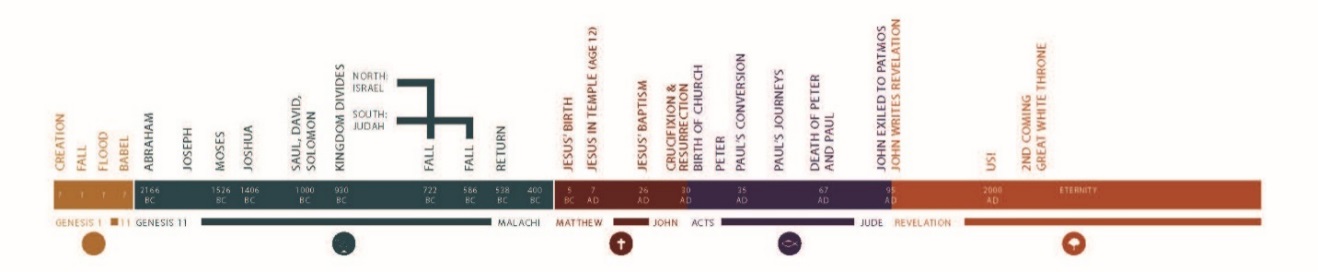
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**To view The Story Chapter 20 sermon video,** [**CLICK HERE**](http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=572)**.**

Today’s message is all about learning to speak up on things that really matter, and in the words of our main character today, “If I perish, I perish.”

Let me tell you the story of Esther – the queen full of beauty and courage.

*Refer to the Timeline poster.*

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**Back Story**

* This whole story is all about God providing the way back for us, ever since the garden.
* To pull this off, His strategy is to create a nation from scratch, called Israel, to deliver the Messiah or Savior who will take away our sins and make us fit for life with God.
* This Messiah who we now call Jesus, because He has come, will come specifically through the tribe of Judah within Israel, so we have been paying careful attention to their story.
* As we fast forward, we find because of their repeated disobedience to God’s laws and plans, they were exiled to Babylon for a period of 70 years. When the 70 years of discipline from God were up, God opened the door for Judah to come back home to Jerusalem and resume their lives with the express goal of bringing the world the Messiah. The Upper Story plan of God is on track and back on schedule.
* It is interesting to note that not all the Jews returned home. Why? Pg. 263 or Ezra 1: tells us

Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites – everyone whose heart God had moved – prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

*Pg. 263; Ezra 1:5*

* The group that returned numbered 50,000 people. The Bible says “God moved in their hearts to go”, but he didn’t move in every Jews heart to return home. Why? Because he has a story to tell with the people left behind and boy…what a story it is.

**Esther’s Story**

The year is 479 BC. Still 479 years until Jesus shows up in the story as a baby. Xerxes is the mighty king of the Medo-Persian Empire.

There is a guy who has risen high in the King’s court named Haman who has it out for the Jews living in his town. Why? Scripture doesn’t tell us, but Jewish tradition suggests he is the offspring of King Agag – king of the Amalekites.

*Refer to the Timeline poster, pointing to the time of Moses and Joshua.*

The Amelekites were one of the nations who were trying to keep Israel out of the Promised Land. In chapter 10 of *The Story*, God asked Saul to completely wipe out the Amalekite people for their extreme evil (like sacrificing their children) and for trying to stop Israel from entering the land of Canaan. Saul did wipe out all the people save the king. Now, years later the king’s offspring is back at it again, this time with a huge grudge against God’s people.

Haman uses his position to get the king to sign an irrevocable decree to have all the Jews executed on one day. The people throughout the 127 provinces of the empire are given permission to kill a Jewish family and take all their possessions legally. The date for this horrific event is set for Adar 13 on the Jewish calendar, which is 11 months away.

What Haman doesn’t know is that Xerxes’ queen is Jewish. She kept this little fact to herself when she became queen, because her cousin Mordecai, who raised her, recommended she conceal her heritage.

Three months into this decree, with only nine months to go, Mordecai sends word to Esther that she must go before the king and plea for mercy for her people before it is too late.

Esther reminds her cousin Mordecai that it is not that simple of a thing to pull off. Look at the bottom of page. 281 or Esther 4 beginning in verse 11 –

“All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

*Pg. 281; Esther 4:11*

A queen had to be summoned by the king. If she just entered into his presence without being summoned she could be punished, be stripped of her crown or even be executed. Now, there was a chance he would receive you. If so, he would signify by extending his gold scepter towards you.

For the record, in case you were wondering, Rozanne does not have to be summoned to come into my presence. I don’t even have a gold scepter.

Mordecai sends back this response to her –

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. **14**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 your royal position for such a time as this?”

*Pg. 282; Esther 4:13-14*

What’s he saying? He is saying this, “Esther, you have not come to this place of immense influence by accident. Could it be that God placed you here in advance for this very purpose?” That’s heavy stuff.

So, Esther has a decision to make. Here is her response –

“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

*Pg. 282; Esther 4:16*

After three days of fasting, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace. The king was sitting on this throne and he saw Esther…and…he held out his gold scepter and Esther approached and touched the tip.

And, as a result, the Jews were saved. Even to this day, they commemorate this event in a celebration called “The Feast of Purim.” This year it will be celebrated on March 12-13. Once again we see God intervening from the Upper Story to take what looks like a disaster in the Lower Story to advance his ultimate theme – the redemption of humanity.

**Application**

What can we learn from this story today for our lives? Here are some thoughts I have –

**God has placed you in a position of influence.**

Acts 17:26 tells us that God appointed this exact time in history and this exact place for you to live. He has given you a sphere of influence already. For some of you, he is preparing you for that place, and it is often proceeded by a very difficult season to make you tough and strong and to learn to dig deep into your relationship with Christ. This is what God did with David. His influence was limited to the small flock of his dad’s sheep in Bethlehem. But God had in mind for him to be the Shepherd or King of all of Israel. To prepare him, he sent him on the run from King Saul for 14 years to mature him. For some of you, you are still in preparation for your greatest position of influence. Prepare well, my friend.

Some of you are students who are going to schools that are much darker than the era I went to school. There are Hamans everywhere.

Some of you are teachers and administrators.

Some of you are parents – moms and dads, and you have this unbelievable influence over one or more little human beings that will determine the trajectory of their lives.

For some it is your influence at work. Our oldest son is an attorney. Do you know what his work address is? 1717 Pennsylvania Ave. He is a young man in his late 20’s and has been placed by God right in the middle of things. Might be a few Hamans hanging out in that city.

For me, I’m the Senior Minister of a very large church. Of the 500,000+ churches in America, Oak Hills is currently the 42nd largest church. I am in the constant position of asking God, “how do you want me to use this influence you have given me?”

God tells us that if we are faithful with a little influence, he will likely expand it.

Here are two things we need to get right -

**You must know when to keep your mouth shut.**

My mom used to always say to me, “Just because you think it, doesn’t mean it you should say it.” We need to learn when it is appropriate to keep our mouth shut.

* In matters of preference (Romans 14:1-9)

The Bible teaches that people are weak people when they confuse truth for preference and push their preference on others as though it were truth. A mature, strong person knows the difference.

* To people who won’t listen (Matthew 7:6)

One of my seminary professors was invited to debate an atheist. He asked the man if he was willing to change his position if convinced and the man said “no.” So, the professor declined the invitation. Whenever I am talking with someone who clearly is unwilling to listen or change their view, I do what Jesus told me to do – “don’t cast pearls before swine.”

* When you’re angry (Proverbs 15:1; James 1:19)

Speaking up when you are angry in spirit almost always creates a bigger mess than you started with. Proverbs teaches “a soft answer turns away wrath.” Parents, when you discipline your children when you are angry, it undermines the character of your leadership. Bite your tongue and tell them you will talk later. Go to your prayer closet and get yourself in the right frame of mind for the sake of your child and then approach them. A calm, loving, determined soul unnerves the child and respect is granted.

And…do not send emails after midnight. I have regretted every one. I’ll draft it so I can go back to sleep but I don’t push send. When I wake up in the morning, I reread it. I have never sent one after I reread it. Never.

* Judging someone’s motive (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Jesus said we shouldn’t go around judging people. Church people and extremely politically left people are the very worst at this. One of the biggest mistakes people make is pretending you are an expert on the motives behind why a person did what they did. When people did this to the Apostle Paul and in 1 Corinthians, he responded by saying (and I paraphrase), “That’s interesting that you know the motives behind what I do, because I am not completely sure what my motives are; only the Lord knows for sure, and he will one day reveal that to me.”

Story of guy in airport waiting room whose kids were being obnoxious, but he was oblivious. When someone said something to him about getting his kids under control, he apologized and said they were just returning from burying their mother. The Christian response to someone having difficulty should not be to judge, but rather to seek to understand, to pray for him, and to offer to help with the children.

* When you don’t know what you’re talking about (Philippians 2:3)

You don’t want to be known as the guy or gal who thinks they know it all; a legend in your own mind. We are all ignorant in different subjects. I remember the day, now years ago, I gave myself permission to say, “I don’t know, what do you think?” Turns out people like being around me more now.

We have all been given a position of influence by God. We need to know when to keep our mouth shut, but like Esther…

**You must know when it is time to speak up**

Maybe you didn’t know this, but we live in a PC society. Does anybody know what “PC” stands for? – of course, “Politically Correct.” My brother suffered a stroke over a year ago now and he cannot speak – left with maybe 10 words. Truthfully, as a Christian, as a minister, in our society today, I don’t feel much different. I feel muted. And while I don’t want to be needlessly offensive or try to use legalism to lead people to Christ, some things just have to be said. “If I perish, I perish.”

There are issues that God invites us to speak up on.

Defend the weak and the fatherless;  
     uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.  
**4**Rescue the weak and the needy;  
     deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

*Psalm 82:3-4*

This passage is teaching that God wants his followers to speak up for those who do not have a voice.

**Domestic Violence** – A number of years ago I was at a dinner to raise money to fight domestic violence. The speaker was Nicole Brown Simpson’s sister. She said that education helps, laws help, counseling helps but there is only one universal solution to domestic violence – good neighbors. She said, if neighbors knew each other and cared about each other they would know when domestic violence is happening in the home and should speak up immediately. A few months ago when the police officer in San Antonio was gunned down in cold blood I was invited to meet with the Mayor and Police Chief. They reported this incident was not racially motivated but was also domestic violence. They reported that the majority of crimes in our city are domestic violence. God wants us to speak up and say something.

**Unborn** – While I don’t want to heap anymore guilt on people who have already done this as if there is no forgiveness available in Christ, but we must say something about the voiceless unborn. Mothers are the most amazing people on the planet. The depth of their love is great. So, when we live in a society where many mothers are no longer protecting the lives of their children, we are in deep trouble. And, the majority of abortions are not among the poor but the wealthy. And the majority of abortions are happening within the Christian community. We must speak up.

**Refugee** – The topic of the immigrant and refugee has been huge these days. What are we to think? What are we to say? How many of you are bold enough to say, “If it is in the Bible it is good enough for me?” Well, here are nine verses in the Bible that explicitly say followers of God should take in refugees-–

* Leviticus 19:33-34
* Leviticus 119:9-10
* Deuteronomy 10:18-19
* Ezekiel 16:49
* Exodus 23:9
* Malachi 3:5
* 1 Kings 8:41-44
* Job 31:32
* Matthew 25:25-36

Let me just put one up for you. Leviticus 19:33-34 –

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

*Leviticus 19:33-34*

The Christian must stand up for the cause of the immigrant and refugee. But few issues are one dimensional. God also grants rights and responsibilities to government leaders (Romans 13:1-7). It is right for them to develop policies and laws for legal immigration and to protect our borders. If we undermine this law, where does this lawlessness stop? As a smart Christian, you do not have to support one truth at the expense of the other. Both are true and right, and these dual truths call for Christians to be sophisticated thinkers. Christians need to support refugees coming into our country, and be active in ministering to them. But Christians also need to comply with the laws regarding immigration, and to support the lawmakers who looking for appropriate ways to protect our citizens. Interestingly, next week we will be reading about Nehemiah, whom God called to build a wall around Jerusalem to protect the residents of Jerusalem. Christians need to be sophisticated thinkers and rise above political parties and positions and support the whole truth of God at the same time.

When I was in junior high, I had just become a Christian, and there was a boy in our school named Freddy who had a condition of excessive water on his brain. One day a group of bullies was slamming Freddy up against the lockers and calling him “melonhead.” Everything in my Christian spirit said, “Stand up for Freddy. Those guys are more than you and bigger than you, but be an Esther, and stand for Freddy.” And I did not, and I regret it to this day. I wish I had had the courage of Esther, and decided to stand for Freddy, and if I perish, and I most certainly will, then I perish.

**Conclusion**

What position of influence has God given you right now? What does he want you to say? I say to you what Mordecai said to Esther –

“And who knows but that you have come to your position for such a time as this?”

*Esther 4:14*

*PRAYER*