

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

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“Don’t Get Tripped Up...”

Series: Esther - For Such A Time As This

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Esther 1

Life can be confusing disorienting and isolating even if you are the Queen. After reading Esther 1, it’s not surprising that people would be confused by the obvious differences between then and now. And even angry at what was said in the first chapter. Yet, what is missed in the reading of chapter one, about Esther, not Xerxes and tells us all that in spite of the arrogance, and ignorance of King Xerxes, we see the determination of Esther. And we come to realize how, this young Jewish woman stood again the establishment of her day, and stood up for women and saved the whole people of Israel.

The weather had been nasty. The rain was coming down very hard and it was very difficult to see. Seeing tail lights ahead of her she followed the car in front as it seemed to be going the right direction. So she stuck with it.

All of sudden the car in front of her came to stop. She began wonder what had happened, perhaps the car in front had hit a deer or something like that. She began to feel uncomfortable, thinking being stopped in the middle of the road can often times lead to accidents.

Much to her alarm the car in front of her turned off their lights. Her concern was perhaps now turning to anger. Why was this person stopping in the middle of the road and then turning off their lights?

She was then startled by a knocking on her window. She looked up and there was a man standing in the pouring rain wanting to speak to her. She cracked the window open and asked the man what the problem was. The man replied by stating that that was the question he was going to ask her. She retorted, “Well, I’m not the one who had stopped in the middle on the road and then turned off the lights. The man replied, “Lady, I’m not on the road, I’m in my driveway.”

Sometimes, life is like that. Confusing, disorienting, and isolating

Today we are going to begin a new series on the book of Esther where we will see how God is working behind the scenes to prepare the way for Esther to become the queen of Persia and to save her people from a terrible plot to destroy them all. For those who are not familiar with the story of Esther, it is a story with four major characters: the king, Haman (the prime minister), Esther, and Esther’s righteous cousin - Mordecai.

It is a message that reminds us all that no matter what you are going through – no matter how confusing, disorienting or isolating - that God is at work behind the scenes of our lives to work out his will and purpose for our good for such a time as this.

The chapter begins with a description of King Xerxes, who ruled over a vast empire from India to Ethiopia. He was a powerful and wealthy king. He was trying to impress everyone by throwing a lavish banquet for all his officials and nobles that lasted for six months and show off his beautiful bride.

One of the evenings, the King sent an order to have Esther come to the party and be displayed like a trophy before the people. Esther refused declaring that she did not want to be objectified for the purpose of entertainment.

The King being publicly embarrassed by her refusal became enraged and the advisor used the time to undermine Esther as Queen and potentially remove her. And we see, how we can all get tripped up at times in life.

I

Don't get tripped up by investing in **pride**. "*But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.*" *Esther 1:12 (NLT)* King Xerxes threw a massive six-month long celebration to impress the dignitaries from the 127 different provinces over which he ruled. After which he had a week long party for anybody and everybody in the capital city. In his drunken pride he wanted to show everyone how great he was and when the Queen put him in his place his pride caused him to respond in a disrespectful and disgraceful way.

Xerxes failed to realize that pride often ignites, inflames and intensifies anger. Pride is the only disease known that makes everyone sick except the one who has it.

One night at sea, a ship's captain saw what he thought were the lights of another ship heading towards him. He had his signalmen blink to the other ship, "Change your course 10 degrees south." The reply came back, "No, you change your course 10 degrees north." The ship captain answered, "I am a captain. Change your course south." Another reply came, "Well, I'm a seaman first class. Change your course north." The captain was mad now. "swearing he said change your course south. I'm on a battleship!" To which the reply came back, "And I say change your course north. I'm in a light house." (Adapted from Speaker's Library of Business 48, Joe Griffith, Englewood Hills, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990)

One way to be able to avert personal disaster is to swallow our pride.

II

Don't get tripped up by investing in pride or **borrowing bitterness**. "*He immediately consulted with his wise advisers, who knew all the Persian laws and customs, for he always asked their advice.*" *Esther 1:13 (NLT)* It is in fact a wise thing to consult advisors when you need to extricate yourself from a problematic situation. However, if these advisors have a vested interest in tell you what you want to hear and not what you *need* to hear that is going to be a problem. Or if these advisors have a secret desire for your downfall because of their jealousy or bitterness towards you that too will become a problem.

Clarence Darrow, the famed criminal lawyer once joked: "Everyone is a potential murderer. I have not killed anyone - but I frequently get satisfaction out of obituary notices."

Leonardo Da Vinci once had a terrible falling out with a fellow artist just before he began work on the "Last Supper." The story is told that he determined to paint his enemy as Judas. It was a perfect likeness. But last of all, he set to work painting the likeness of Jesus. No matter how he tried, nothing seemed to please him. Finally, he realized that he could not paint the portrait of Jesus as long as his enemy had been painted into Judas's place. Once that was

corrected, then the face of Jesus came easily. Neither can we paint the face of Jesus in our lives as long as we hold bitterness in our hearts.

I was on a trip with over 10 years ago with my military regiment to visit the places throughout France where soldiers of the Queen's Own Rifles died during WWII. While there I conduct a memorial at each of those sites. At mid-day we stayed for lunch at a French winery. At the end of the drive way I noticed that there was a recycling box, a garbage can and an unexploded bomb (ordinance) container. And there were old bombs in it!

Trying to be nonchalantly, I asked the owner of the winery and farm about it; he said, "Oh, it is nothing. We find a few bombs every time we clear the field. Sometimes they go off and kill the sheep, before we get to them. If that happens then we have mutton for dinner."

"What is true of bombs that are not dealt with is also true of people who have unresolved anger that becomes imbedded bitterness. Buried anger explodes when we least expect it. When anger explodes, it does all sorts of damage. It ends relationships. It causes ulcers. It leads to murder. When anger is turned inward, it leads to depression. When it is turned outward, it leads to aggression. So, it is important to deal with it and not bury it.

"Anger is like a splinter in your finger. If you leave it there, it gets infected and hurts every time you use your finger. If you remove it, the sore heals and you feel better."

III

Don't get tripped up by investing in pride to borrowing bitterness or **trading relationships**. "*So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she.*" *Ester 1:19 (NLT)*

In society today many people put great value on their possessions. Things like the right shirts, jeans, or backpacks, the right job, vacations or neighbourhoods.

William Sloane Coffin has written, "There are people and things in this world and people are to be loved and things are to be used." And it is increasingly important that we love people and use things, for there is so much in our gadget-minded, consumer-oriented society that is encouraging us to love things and use people."

When my children were quite young, I woke up on Saturday morning without the sounds of children playing, fighting, laughing jumping. It was so very strange. I went downstairs saw my wife Liane chatting over a coffee. Then she said, the children wanted to give you a present so wait until they come in the house to get you. About an hour later, one quite wet child came running up to me saying, "Daddy, we have a surprise for you. Come outside fast." So off I went with her pulling my hand as she ran excitedly out the door with me in tow.

"Look Daddy," "We washed your first new car for you." The problem was, they did with a billow and SOS pads. I gave them all a hug and thank them and sent them into the house.

Remembering to love people and use things is never more important. You think about that. Amen.

Prayer of Approach and Confession

Lord, we come to you like Esther, your faithful servant, who risked her life to save her people from destruction. You have chosen us for such a time as this, to be heard at this time for your purpose and will. We confess that we are sometimes feel overwhelmed and weak, but we trust in your power and wisdom. Help us to be wise, like Esther, and to seek your will in everything we do. Thank you for your love and sovereignty in all circumstances. Lord, we confess that we need your help in our life. That isn't easy for us to admit – we would rather say.... We face many challenges, temptations, and decisions and we often can feel alone in the face of them. Help us to trust you and to follow your will, even when it seems risky or difficult.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we come before you today with gratitude for your faithfulness and mercy. We thank you for your Word, which reveals your mighty acts of salvation throughout history. We especially thank you for the story of Esther, who risked her life to save your people from destruction. We praise you for your sovereign control over all things, even when we cannot see your hand at work. We confess that we often doubt your power and your plan, and we fail to trust you in times of trouble. **Forgive us**, Lord, and renew our faith in you. Help us to follow the example of Esther, who prayed and fasted before taking action. **Teach us** to seek your will and your wisdom in every situation. Empower us by your Spirit to stand up for what is right and to speak up for those who are oppressed. **Protect us** from the schemes of the enemy, who seeks to harm us and hinder your purpose. **Remind us** of your promise that you will never leave us nor forsake us, and that nothing can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus. We pray for our church, our community, our nation, and our world, that you would bring peace and justice where there is violence and injustice, that you would bring healing and hope where there is sickness and despair, that you would bring revival and renewal where there is apathy and sin. And as we pray this we are reminded of those who we have lifted to you before in prayer..... We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. And who taught us to pray by saying Our Father.....Amen.

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