

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
By the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

# “What’s Wrong With the World?”

## Series 2: For Such a Time as This

*May 7, 2023*

Esther 2

Have you ever had a problem that you tried to fix but you just ended up making it worse? In trying to fix a problem that he had on the job, a young man had an accident and created a much bigger problem for himself. Here’s what he said about what happened when he was filling out an accident report.

He said, “I am a bricklayer by trade. On the day of the accident, I was working alone on the roof of a ten-story building. When I completed my work, I discovered I had about 500 pounds of bricks left over. Rather than carry them down by hand, I decided to lower them to the ground in a barrel by using a pulley, which, fortunately, was attached to the side of the building at the tenth floor. Securing the rope at ground level, I went to the roof, loaded the 500 pounds of bricks, then went back down to the ground and untied the rope, holding it tightly to insure the slow descent of the 500 pounds of bricks. (You will note in block 11 of the accident reporting form that I weigh 135 pounds.) Due to my surprise at being jerked off the ground so suddenly, I lost my presence of mind and forgot to let go of the rope. Needless to say, I proceeded at a rapid rate up the side of the building. In the vicinity of the fifth floor, I met the barrel coming down. This explains the fractured skull and broken collarbone.

”I continued by rapid ascent, not stopping until the fingers of my right hand were two knuckles deep into the pulley. Fortunately, by this time I had regained my presence of mind and was able to hold tightly to the rope in spite of my pain. At approximately the same time, however, the barrel of bricks hit the ground, and the bottom fell out of the barrel. Devoid of the weight of the bricks, the barrel now weighed approximately 30 pounds. I refer you again to my weight in block number 11 of the accident reporting form. As you might imagine, I began a rapid descent down the side of the building. In the vicinity of the fifth floor, I met that barrel coming up again! This accounts for the two fractured ankles and lacerations to my legs and lower body. The second encounter with the barrel slowed me enough to lessen my injuries when I fell into the pile of bricks, and fortunately, only three vertebrae were cracked.

“I am sorry to report, however, that as I lay there on the bricks – in pain and unable to stand – watching the empty barrel ten stories above me – I again lost my presence of mind – I let go of the rope.” Someone has said, “Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” Like the bricklayer, Xerxes didn’t figure that out until it was too late.

Last week’s reaction to the reading of Scripture was fabulous. It was hilarious to hear how offended you were while the scripture was being read. That is why I apologized in advance not only for the terribly long names and then after because of the terrible King that you heard about.

Wrestling with Scripture is supposed to cause a reaction within us. It would be easy for me to simply ignore the passages of Scripture that offend us, or even anger us.

The reason, I preach through entire books of the Scripture rather than the lectionary is because the lectionary never gives the breadth or depth that is found when studying a whole book of the bible.

You will likely have noticed by now that I generally – not counting dates like Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas will preach from a book from the Old Testament followed by the New Testament or the New Testament followed by the Old Testament - as I have done since being called to Stouffville United. Over the last year or so I have preached through Ephesians, Nehemiah and Philippians, and now Esther and later we will begin the Gospel of John and likely from the book of Ruth from the Old Testament after that.

This is so that we see that the Scripture doesn’t “sugar coat” things. It tells it like it was and is. It doesn’t deny

that King Xerxes was a self-indulgent, sexist, chauvinist, egotistical jerk, trying to impress others because of his own insecurities and who was easily embarrassed and offended into replacing his Queen Vashti on a whim and as we will see in this chapter making Esther Queen.

You will remember from last week that the king displayed his wealth and glory to the nobles of all 127 provinces of his kingdom for six months. The nobles of the provinces liked the king's "take charge" attitude with regards to Queen Vashti and agreed to support Xerxes in his quest to invade and conquer the territory of Greece. Xerxes thought that he had fixed the problem and gained everything that he wanted. Around 481 B.C., he gathered the forces of his empire against Greece...only to be defeated. Xerxes came back home in disgrace. Scriptures don't try to avoid pointing out how people responded to a given situation either good and bad; but in pointing it out they often force us to ask ourselves how would we respond when we see something being done that is wrong. Do we speak up? Do we step up?

In this study of Esther, we see how God brings out of the ashes of a foolish leaders' decisions, a woman who saves a nation; and teaches us lessons for living. In "For Such a Time As This," we see how Esther, a young Jewish woman, becomes the queen of Persia (modern day Iran) and gains favor with King Xerxes. We also see how Mordecai, her cousin and guardian, uncovers a plot to assassinate the king and saves his life. And how God, works his will through them to save the nation of Israel. All the while pointing out lessons not only about God's sovereignty but also about our responsibility. Especially, when we come face to face with the question, what is wrong with the world?

## I

What is wrong with the world? It is that some don't **fess up** to their part in it. <sup>1</sup> *Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.* <sup>2</sup> *Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search..."*

When Xerxes finally awoke from his drunken stupor; rather than admit and retract his disgraceful decision he refused to fess up or face up to his mistake. And as a result others were going to have to deal with the consequences of it.

Quite a few years ago, there had been a contest for the best answer to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" People from all walks of life wrote in with their responses to question. After a month had gone by the editor of the paper published, what he thought was the best response to the question, "What is wrong with the world?" And it went like this: "Dear Editor, I am. Yours sincerely G.K. Chesterton."

If we are honest with ourselves, the only answer to that question is the one that G.K. Chesterton gave. "I am." It is what I do, and don't do. It is my attitude that ever so subtly chooses to convince myself that doing the wrong thing is ok; or to do the right thing for the wrong reason, or the wrong instead of the right – is somehow ok when it is not. And as a result of our refusing to fess up – arguments are started, relationships strain, battles fought, wars begun and lives lost.

## II

What is wrong with the world? It is that some don't fess up, and others don't **rise up**. It's been said, "Circumstances do not determine a person; they reveal them." This was true with Esther. Xerxes was a disgrace as a human being. He approached life by loving things and using people. For him, power, pride and possessions were of great import. But when Xerxes tried to use his wife and Queen as a possession; she put him in his place and he was publicly embarrassed. As a result, he decided to simply replace her as he would any possession. And in her place he put a Jewish woman named, Hadassah, or Esther who was traded like a piece of property into marriage.

This was common practice at that time. And it is still practiced in different parts of the world and if you didn't know here in Canada.

It was a few years ago now, when one of our daughters was in university for nursing. Her friend, who was Muslim was taking nursing as well. One night our daughter received a call from her friend asking if it was going to be very cold out tonight. Sensing there was a problem, she asked her if everything was ok. It wasn't. Her father, had decided to take her back to Nigerian in the morning and trade her into marriage for a piece of

land he wanted there. Having found out, she ran out into the night with only the cloths she was wearing. Not knowing what to do, she called our daughter who told my wife. After, she and I talked, she went with our daughter to pick up her friend and bring her home.

It was decided that she would stay with us as long as she wanted. We protected her, and provided for her. When she went to university over the next few weeks and months she discovered that her father was following her, and attempted to again abduct her and find out where she was staying. When she went to pay her next tuition, she found he emptied her bank account. We helped pay for her tuition that next semester and helped her move to another city and transfer to another university to finish. So that none of this would happen to her again. It was her hope that she would be able to graduate and bring her sisters live with her before this happens to them.

Like Esther, my daughters friend did not have any control over what happened; though she had a place to hide with us. There was no place for Esther to hide. Unlike today where there are laws that are in place to protect someone like Esther. So today if a young woman is forced to go into hiding because she is being coerced into marrying someone she didn't want to marry or risk violence because of dishonouring their family because of her refusal she has at least the law on her side. Yet, unless one is there rise up for them, it really doesn't change much.

Esther had no place to run – Xerxes was the law – but instead of giving in or giving up she rose to the challenge and at great risk to her life- we will learn later - she took advantage this disadvantage and used her position to save her people from a plot to exterminate them.

It has always been the way, that there comes a point in a person's life or a nation when running solves nothing and one must decide to rise up against the injustice that is before them.

*On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. When he met his Cabinet on May 13 he told them that "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." He knew the cause and said, "...we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."* He did so because there are always causes worth fighting for. And there is a time to rise up.

When Alexander Solzhenitsyn received his Nobel Peace prize he said in his acceptance speech; "Governments love darkness because the deeds are evil." Darkness allows us to deal in lies. "And what do you do when the lie is in the world?" He said, "Let the lie come to the world – it may even be triumphant - it may over take the world, but not through me! For one word of true outweighs the world"

### III

What is wrong with the world? It is that some don't fess up, and others don't rise up or even **step up**.

*"Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who had no father or mother, so Mordecai took care of her.*

*Hadassah was also called Esther, and she had a very pretty figure and face. Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter when her father and mother died." Esther 2:5-7*

There are times in life when you just have to step up. Sometimes you have to step up and do what is right; step up and do what needs to be done – because it is the right thing to do.

Mordecai stepped up took care of his cousin Esther – providing for her, and protecting her and later adopting her as his own daughter – because her parents had died. Even though, by doing so it meant another mouth to feed and another soul to watch over, which wouldn't have been easy in normal times, let alone while living in exile in a foreign country. There are times though, where you just have to step up.

"The term 'step up' means to come forward and claim responsibility, and additionally, it means to succeed when meeting a challenge,"

Tom Brady, arguably the best quarterback ever in the history of the National Football League, stepped up during a game against the New York Jets in 2001 when he was the backup quarterback for the New England Patriots. At the time Brady stepped up to the challenge in the game after the Patriot's starting quarterback, Drew Bledsoe, got injured during the game. "He stepped up when he needed to and led the New England Patriots to the first of their six Super bowls." Whether it involves, stepping up for an individual, team, church or community, there comes a time.

## IV

What is wrong with the world? It is that some don't fess up, rise up, step up and **take up**. *"During the time Mordecai was sitting at the gate and overheard two who conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai."*

Esther could have kept silent about the plot but instead of being a part of violence, she showed him her allegiance and earned his confidence so that she could later make a difference. She took up her part and acted upon it. We all have a part to play in life in order to make a difference.

A group of Canadians, retired teachers, went to France on a tour. Robert Whiting, an elderly gentleman of 83, at the time, arrived in Paris by plane. At French Customs, he took a few minutes to locate his passport in his carry on. "You have been to France before, monsieur?" the customs officer asked sarcastically. Mr. Whiting admitted that he had been to France previously. "Then you should know enough to have your passport ready." The Canadian said, "The last time I was here, I didn't have to show it." "Impossible. Canadians always have to show your passports on arrival in France!" The Canadian senior gave the French custom agent a long hard look. Then he quietly explained. "Well, when I arrived in Normandy on D-Day in '44 to help liberate this country, I couldn't find any Frenchmen to show it to."

As Edmund Burke said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing."

You think about that. Amen.