

Such a time as this

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[0 : 00] Will you now turn with me to the chapter which we've already read in the book of Esther, chapter 4, and words which we shall find in verse 14. Let's read the whole verse again.

It's part of the last message of Mordecai to Queen Esther in that time of peril. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall their enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.

But thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? For such a time as this.

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? My text comes from a familiar story.

A story that we have known, I dare say, from our earliest remembrance. It's full of drama and sensation and holds the interest from first to last.

[1 : 20] And it's got just that kind of conclusion that we should want it to have. It tells us about Esther, who is the heroine of the story.

That she was born in a land of exile. That she had lost her parents when she was young and became the ward of her kinsman Mordecai. It tells us also that she was outstanding in gifts and beauty.

And that King Ahasuerus was so attracted to her after he had put away his former principal queen Vashti that he promoted her to Vashti's place.

Now, so far so good. But Esther was a Jew. And Mordecai, of course, was a Jew.

And the Jews had an implacable enemy in the king's court. This man, Haman. And Haman's anger against Mordecai, when it shows the kind of man Haman was, seems to have been sparked off by Mordecai's restraint in showing reverence to him.

[2 : 52] He wanted to be a big man, this Haman. And all along he seemed to be succeeding. And because Mordecai had offended him by not being so obsequious in his presence as he thought he ought to be, he wanted him removed.

And not only himself, but all his people. And because of the destruction of the Jews would mean a loss of income to the king's coffers, he promised out of his own treasury to contribute 10,000 talents of silver to make good whatever loss the king might incur by the removal of the Jews.

But Mordecai came to know about what was being planned.

And sent a message to Esther, apprising her of it, and pointing out to her that she was about the only person who could do anything to save her kinsfolk in this time of grave peril.

The queen's reply betrayed a very understandable fear. Although she was in high favor with the king, the king might set her aside just as lightly as he had done her predecessor in that office.

[4 : 39] Besides, high though her station was, it would be presumption on her part to go into the king's presence uncalled for.

She reminds Mordecai of that. All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces do know that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come into the king, into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death.

Except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter that he may live. And then there was this hint which you find in the close of verse 11 that she was afraid the king was perhaps beginning to tire of her.

I have not been called to come in unto the king these 30 days. Now in our text we have Mordecai's final appeal to her.

An appeal that John Trapp described as a heap of holy arguments. Let's hear it again.

[5 : 57] For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place. This man hasn't lost his faith.

But thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

Here then we have first of all an urgent need. Thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this. It was sheer desperation that drove Mordecai to urge his young kinswoman to take this action.

It might seem cowardly to us if we didn't know the background of the story that he was putting her into a peril that he would not face himself.

But in point of fact he was appealing to the only person who could serve the cause of the Jews. She had influence with the king.

[7 : 14] He had none. And his words show that he sees the hand of God in her advancement. He had watched the gradual grouping of events and knew that it was not by chance that she was exalted at that particular time.

If any person could influence the king to revoke the inhuman decree that he had allowed Haman to pass to which the king's seal had been affixed then Esther was that person.

A great responsibility then rested upon her. Humanly speaking nothing stood between the Jews on complete destruction but her mediation.

The times were not normal. if they had been her silence would have been allowable.

But the time called for speech resolute courageous speech and action. Esther's life had reached its crisis.

[8 : 41] she could make that her finest hour as indeed she did but if she chose to play for safety her name would go down to history blenished and tarnished.

Mordecai was right it wasn't just an accident that she was where she was at that particular hour. Nor let me bring this right into ourselves nor is it an accident that we are where we are at this hour for at the times of Esther called for courageous action so do our times we are called to range ourselves on the side of God and to make ourselves known as his people.

A nation was threatened in a particular way in Esther's time nations indeed the whole world are threatened in these times in which we live we live my dear friends in a doomed world if we turn away from the gospel of Jesus Christ it was into a doomed world that he came as God's ambassador of mercy to seek and to save the lost to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance not to be ministered unto but to ministered and to give his life a ransom for many and we've had our

Christian privileges it is time then even if we've not already done this that we should yield ourselves and declare ourselves to be his shall we whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high can we to men benighted the lamp of life deny salvation all salvation the joyful sound proclaim till each remotest nation has heard Messiah's name there's a moment of crisis in the life of every man just as there was that moment of crisis in the life of Esther who knows but they would come to the kingdom for such a time as this just think how the world in which we live has benefited and been enriched by men and women who refused to be silenced when they realized that it was time for them to speak that they were God's voice and witness to a strayed humanity think of the times in which

Elijah lived what would have happened if he had kept silence think of the time in which Jeremiah lived the other prophets the time in which John the Baptist lived the forerunner of Jesus Christ who was sent to prepare his way before him think of the time in which our reformers lived a time in which the world and the church had gone completely astray from God or there were godly people here and there who were calling for deliverance and God heard and answered but it looked like a doomed world what if Martin Luther had held his peace and John Calvin and John Knox dear we who have entered into their labors withhold our witness in our own time it certainly is not a time for self-seeking and self-indulgence not as it a time for secret discipleship it's a time in which Christ is saying to all his people let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven and he spoke of the folly of lighting a candle and then putting under a bushel there's a lesson there for the secret disciple light as not meant to be kept secret it's meant to illumine a wider area than the inside of an inverted bushel it's given so that it may shine before men that they may see your good works and not glorify you but glorify him who gave you the light because it's all his glorify your father who is in heaven oh my dear friends what might happen if silent

[14 : 39] Christians were to speak and speak out if slumbering Christians were to wake up and put on their armor for God and for righteousness we let ourselves off by saying we're not influential enough to account for anything in the work of God's kingdom he didn't say that and from the beginning of time he has used instruments that the world would have reckoned feeble indeed to the point of being derisive for the carrying out of his great purposes in the nations and throughout the world we can make our contribution to that if you read through the early history of the church that period in which the church of Jesus

Christ is seen gradually emerging and taking shape you would be impressed by this fact that the church was built up not by great leaders although there were great leaders at the beginning of the church and throughout all periods of the church's history but mostly by non-entities like ourselves people who in public reckoning count for nothing the prayers and the labors of Christian men and women in every land men and women who felt that unto them much had been given and that God was not unreasonable in expecting that unto whom much was given of the same should much be required it's discouraging work probably you found that if you put your hand to the work of the Lord discouraging sometimes as it seems very unrewarding and yet you know as you discover more and more as you grow old in the service of the Lord evidences keep appearing that labors of years long ago labors forgotten were not in vain in the Lord it wasn't very much encouragement that Paul the greatest missionary of the New Testament you might say was given in his work all the opposition that met him there was a call to Macedonia but when he reached Macedonia they threw him into prison and scourged him not the kind of welcome that he might have expected and so it went on you remember how he gives a list of his sufferings for the cause of Jesus Christ well not that he's boasting but he's telling that they were worthwhile that that's the way God works and sometimes when he preached they laughed at him when he went to Athens the city of the philosophers they were very critical in the audience that they gave him they called him a babbler a word scatterer not much of a compliment to a man who was pouring out his very soul in earnest appeal more politely some of them said we will hear thee again of this matter but that wasn't the end of it he left witnesses behind him in Athens and a Christian church gradually took shape in that city convinced that the world by wisdom knew none God and that the world by wisdom could never get to know God the all transforming name of Jesus Christ was the lost chord and it must be sounded secondly we have here a common temptation if thou altogether holdest thy peace there are times when as the proverb has it silence is golden but this certainly wasn't one of them but Esther refused to speak at that time her place in history would be very different from what it is and yet we might well find it in us to excuse her even if she had held her peace for it was to no easy undertaking that she was called to identify herself with the doomed [20 : 43] Jews at that point required courage of the very highest it it would seem that she was tempted to keep silence from a sense of danger and who would blame her you get a hint of it I think in her reply to Mordecai in verse 11 which we already read where she reminds him of the law that nobody dared intrude into the king's presence without a summons on that he hadn't sent for her for thirty days things didn't look well for such a mission as Mordecai was suggesting the law was the same to the queen as to the comor and she knew it it would be very hard to blame her if her courage had failed her in that hour the protecting walls of the palace stood between her and the fate to which her countrymen were doomed it was a challenging moment now there are certain temptations which quite evidently assailed the queen at this particular time that you and I know all about and they are responsible or we are responsible by yielding to them for a great deal of unavowed discipleship and in activity in the Christian life the first temptation is this what's the use what can we do you can spell that out in

Esther's reply to first reply to Mordecai I'm right up against it she said there's this law and it's the same for the queen as for the commoner it's death to the person that intrudes into the presence of the king without a summons what's the good it's dangerous trust we've used that with very much less reason than she had I'm sure we have there was a time when it was very dangerous indeed when religion vital religion meant more in Scotland than it does at this present time to avow oneself as an out and out Christian it was the age of the thumbscrews of the gallows of the rack of the stake the hands of the persecutors have been bound but the spirit of persecution has not been bound it still remains true that if any man who live godly in Christ Jesus he will suffer persecution perhaps you've discovered it perhaps you're suffering from that even now so that even if there isn't active persecution and if there is an easy toleration of different

religions it's still not an easy thing to declare oneself a Christian out and out and to live out the kind of life that that profession indicates it would have been very much easier for Nicodemus to have said nothing at all about Jesus of Nazareth easier not to have intervened in that discussion at all quite evidently it wasn't easy for him to make even that intervention much easier it would have been too for Joseph of Barmathia not to raise his voice in support of Jesus in the Supreme Court might bring suspicion upon himself and unwelcome consequences what's the use what can I do in any case that was one of the temptations another was this doesn't all depend on me

Esther might have said if the Jews are indeed the covenant people of God and she knew that they were just as Mordecai did and as he said then deliverance will arise to them for another quarter from another quarter I'm not indispensable to God's plan I can hold my peace and still my people can be delivered the Lord would find other ways and don't we say that too sometimes I mean in the matter of spreading the knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ Christ it's the minister's job it's the elder's job it's the job of those who have been trained for the work what can we do it wasn't to ministers and elders that Jesus said ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth it was to the whole body of believing people and you come in there there's no evading it there ought to be no such thing in the work of the kingdom of God as leaving it to the other person the better qualified

[28 : 31] Moses tried that you remember Aaron told God was very much better qualified for this work that he was suggesting for him than he was but God didn't take his suggestion Jeremiah tried the same thing our Lord he said I am but a child it's a tremendous commission that you given to me I can't carry it I am but a child and God told these men and many others that well they might be as children and if they were so much the better his strength is perfect not in human strength but in human weakness and that's what happened quite true the Jews were not going to perish as Matthew

Henry says man's plans may change but God's covenant never but God uses instruments that's his way of doing things he created the world alone he had no laborers his fire brought all things into being and when Jesus came into the world to save his people he trod the wine press alone of the people there was none with him nobody could share in the glory of that achievement on the cross it was his it was his alone but it pleases him to work through instruments people instruments like ourselves the Lord who could feed the multitudes accepted the lunch if that's what it was and it could well be of the boy in the crowd who had the five loaves and the fishes he uses means why not you glad that he does what higher glory can there be than to be workers together with him to think that some way or other in some humble way or other we've made some contribution to the extension of his kingdom that's something to be gloried in not in a boastful way but in a thankful way that God should call us omnipotent

God should call us weak fallible and reliable creatures to be workers together with him but he does and as Hugh Redwood somewhere says it's wonderful what God can make of a broken life when he gets all the parts there's the rub when he gets all the parts when the submission consecration is complete take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee sang that weakly invalid woman Frances Ridley Havergal it was her prayer and God took her life and it was consecrated to him and thousands are thanking her still for her contribution to the

Lord's cause I sometimes feel when I read that passage which tells us about the trial of Christ where Pilate inquired of him concerning his disciples I sometimes feel that that must have been one of the most painful experiences Christ had to endure his disciples where are they gone the multitudes who used to sing the hosannas those who had greeted him on his last entry into Jerusalem as if he were a conqueror where had they all gone and the man who had followed him during his public ministry in particular so what would become of them must have been a painful moment one had betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver one had just a moment before denied him gone out into the darkness to weep they all had forsaken him and had fled but oh the infinite compassion and the infinite understanding of the

Lord I will smite the shepherd God had said in the prophecies and the sheep shall be scattered and I will turn my hand upon the little ones the turning of the hand means the gathering of the men he's not going to let them be scattered he's not going to let them be lost to the service of Christ and his church he's going to sanctify even that experience of failure and commission them anew isn't it wonderful to have a master like that so tonight my friend if you are oppressed with a feeling of

nothingness or a feeling even worse than that of failure and you say what's the use I can't do it remember

[35 : 52] Jesus is still being inquired of us to his disciples don't let them down his grace is sufficient for thee his strength is made perfect in weakness lastly then there is no text of stern warning if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time then shall their enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place God is not going to abandon his plans but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed that's the alternative thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed and who knoweth whether thou would come to the kingdom for such a time as this these were unsparing words words that were called forth by

Esther's last reply to her kinsman but they weren't unfeeling words but the time was running out and plain speaking was required retribution would be certain to follow negligence and the letting slip of an opportunity like this or even if she did escape the sword of Haman she certainly wouldn't escape the judgments of coming history one way or another that would be her finest hour or her worst everything depended upon her decision in the face of the challenge that was put to her and there are moments like that my dear friends in the lives of every one of us a time we know not when a place we know not where that marks the destiny of men for glory or despair a line by us unseen that crosses every path the hidden boundary between

God's patience and his wrath it's a solemn thought that somebody may be just at that point tonight it's a difficult world that we are living in yes such a time as this Mordecai had said and what a lot lay behind that phrase and what a lot lies behind it today in our time such a time as this I don't need to describe it you know it a time of spiritual declension a time of weakened convictions a time of increasing iniquity and moral depravity oh it'll all be in the newspapers tomorrow the widespread iniquity and wickedness of this weekend this very weekend it's all there there's a desperate need for spiritual quickening the days are evil

Esther made the venture and faith was rewarded the king held out his golden scepter to her and the story as I said ends just as you wanted it to end with a complete discomfiture of Haman and his fellow conspirators to say the least and with the deliverance and indeed exaltation of the doomed people the plot failed more than that it rebounded upon the person who had devised it and Esther acquired imperishable fame her name means as you know star and she certainly reached stardom in the spiritual life in that hour of crisis and you and I may do the same tonight although in so much humbler circumstances for do we not read that they that be wise shall shine with the brightness of the firmament and as the stars forever and ever it may be your moment of opportunity my dear friend the moment of crisis take it as such and may

God bless you let us pray oh Lord our God we cannot often follow thee and I leading we see only a step or two at a time just as much as our trees to reveal to us and yet it is the action of faith to leave the whole future with thee thou seest what lies in the darkness we don't but Lord our experience of thee ought to be sufficient to lead us into a deeper trust help us Lord tonight may thy challenge come to us if not for the first time then

[43 : 01] Lord with renewed force and thou make this our decisive and the glory shall be thine Amen