

A Queen's resolve

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Preacher: Rev Innes Macrae

[0 : 00] You will find my text this evening in the book of Esther, chapter 4, and verse 14. Esther, chapter 4, verse 14.

The words of Mordecai to Esther. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then there shall enlargement and peace arise to the Jews from another place.

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

Who knowest whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? The narrative which we find in the book of Esther is a fascinating one.

Amongst the Jewish people still, wherever you find them, this is one of the best known parts of the Old Testament. The deliverance which is recorded, the deliverance of the Jewish people, which is recorded in the book of Esther, is one which is remembered and celebrated by the Jews still in the annual feast known as Purim.

[1 : 18] It was in the year 539 BC that Cyrus, king of Persia, issued his famous decree, allowing the Jewish people who had been in bondage in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and there begin the rebuilding of their temple.

Many of the Jews, however, did not want to return. They stayed in the Persian Empire. They had settled down there. They worked there. Their families were there.

And they wanted to remain there. After Cyrus' day, the king was King Dariah. And he was succeeded as king by Ahasuerus.

The king Ahasuerus of this book of Esther. He reigned over the vast Persian Empire. Esther was a king of the first century.

It was a far-flung empire, stretching from India to the upper Nile region. And throughout that empire, there were scattered hundreds of thousands of Jewish people.

[2 : 29] They tenaciously clung to their own religion and to their own distinctive customs. Esther was an orphan Jewess.

A girl brought up by her much older cousin, Mordecai. Now, in the book of Esther, if you read it through, you won't find the name of God at all.

The name of God is not mentioned. Yet, it is to be doubted if there is any part of the Bible where the activity of God is more clearly seen.

To the eye of faith, God is in every chapter of this book. Again and again and again, we find the hand of God upon his people, guiding and directing.

And so, we notice, first of all tonight, divine sovereignty. Divine sovereignty. How was it that this Jewess, a member of the despised Jewish race, came to occupy this exalted position, queen of the vast Persian Empire?

[3 : 42] How was it that he came to occupy this position where he had so much influence over King Ahasuerus, the most mighty monarch of his day?

How was it that he came to be so greatly beloved by King Ahasuerus? It's a remarkable story.

Sometime previously, the king had given a great banquet in Shushan, his capital city.

He invited to it the important officials, the men of the city of Shushan, and for some days there, they spent the time feasting and drinking.

Then, one night, the king spent for his queen, Queen Vaskey. He summoned her to come. He wanted to display her beauty before that intoxicated crowd.

Queen Vaskey was certainly a woman of some spirit. She refused to come. She disobeyed that powerful monarch. She was not going to degrade herself by going on display before that ribald and drunken crowd of men.

[4 : 54] The king was furious. He divorced Vaskey. Another queen had to be found for Ahasuerus. And it was the lovely Esther that became his queen.

Now, of course, we say right away that if Mardukai or Esther herself had anything to do with her entering the competition, for competition it was, if they had anything to do with her becoming one of the girls from whom the king's choice would be made, then we cannot approve of their action at all. It was contrary to God's law that one of his own people should be married to a heathen man, be he a poor man or be he the mightiest monarch on earth.

Far better that Esther should be married to the poorest Israelite of them all than that she should be married to this mighty and powerful tyrant, the king of Persia.

But perhaps they had no say in the matter at all. The king's word was law. At any rate, we find that Esther becomes the queen of kings Ahasuerus.

[6 : 08] It is characteristic, isn't it, of divine wisdom to bring good out of evil. From the most poisonous plants, we obtain healing drugs.

And God overruled the actions of men, the sinful actions of men and women for the good of his people and for the glory of his name.

It was essential that some member of the Jewish race should be there close to King Ahasuerus in a position of great influence over him.

It was necessary in order that the wicked plot of the evil Haman should be overthrown. For he had issued a decree, he had caused to be issued a decree which was going to mean that the Jewish people throughout the whole of the Persian Empire should be put to death.

We haven't time tonight to go into all the details. You can read them for yourself in the book of Esther. But we just noticed this, that God put Esther there.

[7 : 21] It was not by chance that she came to this position. She was there by divine decree. Here we see the sovereignty of God. Who knows but that thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

Chance had nothing whatever to do with Esther's being queen there in Persia. It was God's doing. Where are you tonight, my Christian friend?

Do you ever sigh and say, if only I were somewhere else, if only my circumstances were different? But your circumstances are what they are by divine decree.

You are in the place you are in tonight because God has put you there. And if he has put you there, he has put you there with a purpose. Have he placed you in a Christian home?

If so, he has given you an inestimable privilege. Thank him for it and seek to gain all the benefit you can from that privilege which he has given to you.

[8 : 33] Or are you the only Christian in your home? If that is so, then he has a purpose in placing you there. Thank him for the privilege that is yours in being permitted to be his witness there in that home.

It may well be that you are the means that he is going to use to bring every member of your family to an experience of his great salvation.

In you, grace has entered into that home. See to it that you are faithful to him, utterly faithful to him there, that you witness for him there, not only graciously and widely as you must, but also courageously and boldly and unachamedly.

Is it that in your place of work you are among those who scoff at a Christian profession, among those who blaspheme the holy name of your Lord and Saviour, among those who trample upon the decencies and upon the sanctity?

Such sin no doubt grieves you and must grieve you. But God does a purpose in placing you there. However ungodly may be your environment, see that you remain faithful to him where you are.

[9 : 52] Who knows but that thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this. There are many details in the story of Esther that show to us the divine sovereignty.

There are many coincidences and small events that of great results, they were arranged by God, they were by divine decree. One night, King Ahasuerus couldn't sleep.

Why on that night of all nights could he not sleep? Because the following morning was the day on which the wicked Haman, his favourite, was to come to him in order that there might be signed and sealed the decree ordering the death of Mordecai.

But on that night when he couldn't sleep, King Ahasuerus called for reading material. Perhaps that's what some of ourselves do when we can't sleep.

We pick up a book and read it. But what reading material did he ask for? Of all the kind of material he could have had, he asked for the chronicles, the official records of the Persian Empire to be brought to him.

[11:11] Who ever heard of a man when he couldn't sleep asking for such drab reading material as that to be brought to him? Was there ever a man who asked for such drab reading material as that on a sleepless night?

But there were 127 provinces in the Persian Empire. They are records of which province should be brought to him. Oh, only the records of Shushan, the capital city.

You see, the hand of God is in this. But the records of Shushan were pretty bosky. Which parts of those records are to be read to King Ahasuerus?

It's not possible to read them all to him in one night. But you see, God's hand is in this. There's one part that must be read to King Ahasuerus.

It's a story of how Mordecai, that despised Jew, exposed a plot by two men to assassinate King Ahasuerus sometime before.

[12:15] And by exposing that plot, he saved the king from death. Ahasuerus had to hear that record that night. And there and there and then, he asked, what was done to reward this Mordecai?

Nothing was done, he was told. He wasn't rewarded in any way for what he did. Well, he must be rewarded right away. There's not a moment to lose. Right now, we must set about rewarding this man.

Why all this hurry? Because at that very moment, there had come into the king's palace the wicked Haman, in order that he might have that decree for Haman's death, signed and sealed, and that Haman might be hanged on that 75-foot gala, which Haman had called to be erected for Mordecai. You see, God's timing is perfect. Perfect to the very second. It is Mordecai who was on it. And it is Haman who was hanged on his own gala.

We see the divine sovereignty also in the details of the decree that Mordecai, that Haman, caused to be issued ordering the death of the Jews.

[13:30] It was issued in the first month of the year. But it wasn't to be carried out until the 12th month, not until the 13th day of the 12th month. Why all the delays?

Of course, it was necessary to give time for the messengers to go to the 127 provinces and proclaim that decree, but they didn't need 11 months to do that. You see, it was ordered of God so that there would be time also for another decree to go out and be brought to those provinces, a second decree which would effectively neutralize that first decree and so allow this fearing of God's people to prevent their slaughter.

You see it also in the very method by which the Jews were to be slain. If Haman had decreed, had issued in that decree, had declared in it that the Jews were to be put to death by the Persian army, then that would most certainly have had to happen for the laws of the Medes and Persians could never be offered.

But curiously, Haman didn't do that. He said in that decree that it would be for the civilians themselves who wanted to do so to rise up and slay the Jews and obtain their wealth and their money as a foil.

The effect of that was just this, that when that second decree was issued, and that second decree which allowed the Jews to defend themselves, it meant that the Jews were spared.

[15:12] So you see, by that time, Mordecai himself had become the most influential man at the Persian court. And no member of the Persian empire, no citizen of the Persian empire would dare ride up and attack the Jews as they were allowed to do by the previous decree.

In it all, we see the sovereign hand of God. My Christian friends, settle this in your minds tonight, once and for all, that all the details of your life are ordered by God.

Details that you think are so insignificant significant cannot be by chance. They are by divine decree. He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

The people you meet in the course of the day are the people God has ordained you should meet. The friendships you make are the friendships ordained by God. Even your sleepless nights have their place in the outworking of God's plan.

many a person has had reason to thank God for various reasons that he has missed an aeroplane or missed a train. As you look back upon your life, don't you see that there were events which you couldn't understand at the time, but which you now see to have been of great significance in the

outworking of God's gracious and loving plan for you.

[16:38] cultivate the habit, my friends, of seeing the hand of God in everything. Nothing, absolutely nothing is by chance.

Isn't it comforting to know that our God is in control and that he is working out his gracious, loving purposes? But we see the sovereignty of God too also in the way in which his people are trying. Mordecai refused to bow down before the proud Haman as he strutted by. As a result, his life was threatened.

But not only was his life threatened, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the Persian Empire were threatened too. Haman had remained true to principle and as a result, it seems, the Jewish people of the Persian Empire were to be made extinct.

Wasn't that the trial for him of the first order? And think of Esther herself. There in the Persian court she heard of the terrible distress, the terrible threat to her cousin Mordecai to whom she had owed so much.

[17:58] And not only to him but to all her people, the Jewish people, scattered throughout the Persian Empire. How distressing that must have been for her. What a trial that was. The only possible way of preventing their being put to death was for her to go into the king's presence and plead for them.

But to go into the king's presence without being summoned, to go into the presence of a tyrant, an eastern potentate like King Ahasuerus, without being summoned into his presence, was almost certain day.

What a trial it was for Esther herself. In his sovereignty, you see, God tries his people.

He tests his people. From time to time, affliction comes to the people of God. God does never promise that the lives of Christian people will be always easy and comfortable and that there will be no difficulty or affliction or trouble.

He delivers his people, yes, but only after the trial which he has permitted has accomplished the purpose for which he did. Save the dross from the metal, so that the gold is purified.

[19:10] Tribulation worship patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. Tribulation, trouble, produces endurance, Paul is saying there, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, pure and certain hope.

Don't be surprised, Christian friend, as trial and testing come, that you're being tried is a mark of a Christian.

Trial is a mark of a Christian. It's evidence to you that you are a Christian believer. But be assured of this. God will not allow you to be tried beyond your strength.

He has a greatest purpose in submitting the trial. He will sustain you in the trial, and He will most certainly in His own good time, in His own good time, deliver you from the trial.

The trial comes to you in a sovereign and in a loving plan of God. The sovereignty of God, divine sovereignty, that's what we notice first of all, yes.

[20:16] But let us notice, secondly, human responsibility. Human responsibility. God is sovereign, yes. But Esther has her responsibility too.

She has her work to do. She has her duty to perform. She has come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Mordecai spoke truly when he said this.

Who knows whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this. As that he makes it clear, she had to go into the king's presence to make supplication unto him and to make requests before him for her people.

She had to go into his presence and if she went in without being summoned into his presence, that would mean death and death unless the king could hold out to her with golden steps out.

She didn't know whether that could be the case or not. But she had to go into his presence and into his presence she did go. How noble was her resource.

[21:27] She responded in verse 16. She said, So will I go in unto the king which is not according to the law and if I perish, I perish.

Not only did she go into the king's presence but she sought out where in advance just how she would behave and what she would say. She planned it all in detail.

She behaved with great wisdom. You see, she knew that she had her work to do, her part to play, her duty to perform. She planned the great banquet to which she was to invite Haman and to invite the king herself.

She was in all that she could do to make the king favorably disposed toward her request. She was active. She knew that God was sovereign here but she knew that she had her part to play, that she had her duty to perform, that she had her work to do.

Not only that, but she took to prayer. She sent the message to Mordecai that she was to summon all the Jews, all his own people, her own people there in Susia and for three days they were to fast and pray.

[22 : 46] And she summoned all her maidens who were attempting to hire there in the Persian court and for three days they fasted and they prayed. She did not say there's no point in praying.

God has decreed what to happen at any rate. Our praying will not make any difference. No, no. They're found in times, no. She did not say that.

Pray she did. She summoned her people to pray and she prayed herself. She knew that she had her responsibility. Our God is sovereign.

God does not do our duty for us.

He commanded us to repent and to believe on his son. But he doesn't repent and believe for us. He renewed us so that we can repent and believe and so that his people do repent and believe.

[24 : 06] But it is we who repent and it is we who believe. God does give us God is giving to us his commandments and he means us to obey those commandments. We are not to be weary in well-doing.

You or I cannot save a soul. That is God's work alone. But we are to go out to our fellow sinners and we are to urge them and we are to employ them and we are to persuade them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are to seek them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. We are to do that looking to God to us.

We and also this we must pray. There are those who say what's the point in praying? God has foreordained it all again. It will make no difference whether we pray or not.

But such an attitude is totally wrong. We are to give ourselves to prayer. It is a testimony of all God's praying people that God answers the prayers of his people.

[25 : 13] He has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, yes? But he has decreed also that we should pray. Our praying is within his decree. Prayer is in itself an essential part of the deliverance.

Before God delivers his people he stirs them up to pray. It is always the case, my friend. That when God's people experience blessing when an individual Christian experience blessing or when the Christian church experience blessing that blessing comes consequent upon following the earnest prayer of the people of God.

God has commanded us to pray and we must give ourselves to prayer to the work of prayer. We must give ourselves to prayer and we must be diligent in doing the work that he has commanded us to do.

And don't let sink either that if we fail to do our duty that if we fail to meet our responsibility that the plan of God will be taught it.

That is not so. God is sovereign and his plan will most certainly be fulfilled. His faculties will most certainly be fulfilled.

[26 : 39] But if we have neglected to do our duty although God's faculties will be fulfilled we will foster bless us. Notice what it said in verse 14.

Mordecai's words to Esther if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time if you don't do your duty Esther then there shall their enlargement and deliverance arise for the Jews to the Jews from another place from another quarter.

God's password Indians to deliver these people will most certainly be fulfilled Esther but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. God's people the duke will be delivered.

God will certainly deliver his people but you and your family you and your relative Esther you'll suffer. God's practices are always realized but when we fail to do our duty and to meet our responsibility then we lose blessings that we would otherwise obtain.

The sovereignty of God human responsibility Esther did her duty she went in to the king's presence she went in unsummoned and the king did hold out the golden scepter to her God's duty was in control she did her duty and God in his sovereignty delivered his people.

[28 : 15] Oh you say to me I don't understand I don't understand how these two doctrines divine sovereignty and human responsibility can be reconciled.

My friend nor do I but I'm contempt to know this that God does reveal them both his wisdom is infinitely superior to mine and I just leave the matter there they must be reconciled God knows how because they're both truths that he is released I am to go out and do my duty I am to do it with the utmost diligence and I leave the outcome with him.

Human responsibility divine sovereignty human responsibility but thirdly we notice here the outcome the outcome God did deliver his people he delivered them marvelously it was not they who were put to death it was their enemies we cannot say that Esther and all the Jews were themselves altogether blameless they certainly were but nonetheless God did the best for his people a most marvelous deliverance but notice this he did more not only did Esther become queen of the Persian Empire but Mordecai that despised Jew Mordecai he became prime minister of the vast Persian Empire he was exalted to the most influential position in the whole empire next to the king himself God exalted him to that position and the result war that Jewish civil service the Jewish officials throughout the 127 provinces did all that it could to help the Jewish race they became the friends of God's people listen to this chapter 9 verse 3 all the rulers of the provinces and the descendants of the deputies and officers of the kings helped the Jews because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them but that's not all do you know what else happened many of those even people in the Persian Empire many of them became Jews we read in chapter 8 at verse 17 and in every province and in every city whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came the Jews had joy and gladness a feast and a good day and many of the people of the land became Jews for the fear of the Jews fell upon them there were so many of those

Jewish those Persian people or those citizens of the Persian Empire I should say for they weren't all Persian by race Stephen people there were many of them hundreds of them perhaps thousands of them who threw in their lot to the people of God who came to realize that God was with those people they abandoned their false worship they abandoned their pagan ways and they began to worship the true gods of Israel they attached themselves to the worship of the true gods of Israel they became Jewish proselytes and so God was honest oh my friends I say it again I've said it often before and I say it again that when God answers the prayers of his people he answers far beyond their asking beyond even their thinking and their imagining who would have thought that the despised Haman would one day be the most influential person in the whole of the Persian Empire next to the king a few months before it was planned that he'd be hanged and had gathered the Haman erected and now God has exalted him to the position of greatest influence in the empire just as he did with Joseph in Egypt who would have thought that those Persian civil servants would be falling over themselves to help the despised Jewish people who would have thought that thousands of the Persian citizens would themselves become worshippers of a true god oh pray god for what he does divine sovereignty human responsibility and a god glorifying outcome how god loved his people no weapon that is formed against them shall ever prosper isn't it an amazing and a remarkable thing my friend that the Jewish people who have been so bitterly persecuted throughout many centuries have been preserved as a distinct group

[33 : 38] God does that and he believes that he has yet a greatest purpose for them and that in large numbers they will one day respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ but let us notice this too God's love for his true spiritual Israel for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ they are the true Israel of God God's love for the church not all the fury of men nor of death can destroy the church of God his church and his cause must foster you're on the winning side my friend only if you're on Christ's side if you're one of his people and in conclusion let us notice this too God's love for you for you as an individual if you are a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ he has a special love for you you are the apple of his eye he loves you with step past covenant love he loves you before the world began he loves you when time is no more he loves you now and there is nothing nothing in all the universe no experience through which you can ever pass that will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus

I am persuaded that there is nothing I am persuaded said the apostle Paul that there is nothing nothing in death or in life that neither principalities nor powers nor things to come nor heights nor depths nor any other keep shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord oh take that glorious truth with you my friend and meditate upon it and rejoice greatly in it what a privileged person you are tonight if you are a Christian believer you wouldn't want would you not for a million worlds to change places with someone who is not a believer in your salvation no my friend if still you are out of Christ if you are not a believer in him well let me tell you as we were

saying earlier today the Lord Jesus the savior of sinners is dear his arms are out stretched in love and he lovingly invites you now to come to himself no man who comes to me he says I will I cast out come unto me all you that labor and are heavy labor and I will give you rest let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we thank thee for all that thou hast revealed to us in thy works we thank thee that thou art the sovereign God we thank thee that thou hast made it plain to us that thou art in complete control but we thank thee that thou hast made it clear to us also that we have our work to do our responsibility to discharge we pray that we will do whatever thou dost command us to do that we will give ourselves to work and give ourselves to prayer relying upon God to bring about the glorious outcome according to his own marvelous promise we thank thee that thou hast united us to Christ by a faith given us by thyself and we thank thee that there is nothing that will ever separate us from the love of God to us in Christ may this cause us greatly to rejoice and we pray that if any of us as yet do not know Christ that thou wilt bring us to know him to repent of sin and to believe in him that we may rejoice in him and know all the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ for his name is you