

Brave

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you, friends, for serving us. You may have a seat, and please take out your Bible or your app, whatever you are going to use, thank you, to pay attention and follow along with us this morning.

We are over in Esther chapter 5, but when you find Esther chapter 5, you can just back up the truck a little bit into Esther chapter 4, which is where we're going to start with our reading today, so we get a little context on Esther chapter 5.

We need a little bit from Esther chapter 4. I'll hold it for you. How does that sound? Okay, so here is Esther chapter 4, starting at verse number 12, and then we're going to read down through chapter 5, verse number 1. Ready?

Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for him. Don't eat or drink for three days, night or day.

I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king, even if it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went and did everything Esther had commanded him. On the third day, Esther dressed in her royal clothing and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace facing it.

[1 : 3 4] The king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal courtroom facing its entrance. Thank you. Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful for the privilege of being here. We're grateful for the privilege of being your people.

We're grateful to be among those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We're grateful to be among brothers and sisters who love us and care for us and are showing us that love and care through discipleship and commitment through ups and downs and good and bad.

We're grateful for your God. We're grateful for your Holy Spirit. We're grateful for voices to sing.

And we're grateful for our hearts being prepared for continuing in worship now. Father, we want to hear those things that you have to say to us from your word this morning.

We want to understand the things that are important for us to understand. We want to see our Savior Jesus more clearly. We want to understand better what you have for us and what you call us to.

[2 : 5 5] And if any of those things are going to happen, then we are desperately needy for your Spirit to come and work among us, stirring up fresh faith, stirring up new faith, granting life, granting repentance, causing us to reflect again on all that we have in our Savior Jesus and what you call us into as your people.

So would you please help us as we sit under the preaching of your word? Would you please help me and keep me faithful to your word? Help me to say those things that will be beneficial and important for us, meaningful for what you want to do in our hearts.

We ask this for your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, amen. Fear, fear is the natural outcome of not knowing.

Think about this. Are you afraid of heights? Why are you afraid of heights? Because you don't know how many bones you will break when you hit the ground.

That's why you are afraid of heights. Are you afraid of snakes or spiders? Why? Because those things are unpredictable. You don't know when they're going to move.

[4 : 19] You don't know what they're going to do. You don't know where it's going to go. Are you afraid of the dark? I am. Do you know why? Because you don't know what's out there.

Are you afraid of sickness? This is a different kind. You're not afraid of the dark. You're not afraid of what's out there. If you're afraid of being sick, getting sick, you're afraid of what's happening in here.

That's what we're afraid of. Are you afraid of being in a cave? I am. Why? Because you don't know if you can make your way back out of the cave.

Are you afraid of getting lost? Why? Because you don't know where your parents have gone. Are you afraid of commitment? It's because you don't know if he or she is the right one.

Are you afraid of small spaces? You don't know if you'll be able to reach your nose if it starts to itch. Are you afraid of decision making? Well, I just don't know if I have enough information.

[5 : 23] Are you afraid of rejection? I don't know why people are turning away from me. Are you afraid of death? Why? Well, because we don't know what comes after that.

We're afraid because of what we don't know. And Esther faces a long list of unknowns. She does not know if she will get to the king.

If she gets to the king, she does not know how the king will respond. She does not know if her plan will work.

She does not know what Haman is capable of. Or perhaps better, what else Haman is capable of. Fear is a very natural response to all of these unknowns.

So before approaching the king, Esther directs Mordecai to have all of the Jews in Susa fast.

[6 : 26] Kids, do you know what a fast is? Oh. No takers? Okay. Owen, what do you got? When there's a lot of food?

Right. The opposite of that one, right? When you don't eat food and maybe you choose not even to drink for a little while. Some people do that when they're trying to lose weight, perhaps. They get themselves on a cycle like that of some intermittent fasting or something like that.

Maybe you fast when you are praying and asking God to reveal something to you, to make something clear to you. And so you choose to fast and pray.

I don't know that we typically do this for three days and three nights. That feels like a very long fast, doesn't it? No food, no water.

Do you think you could do that, Owen? You think you could skip food and water for three? I don't think I could either. Some of us get hungry after three hours, right? Like you ate breakfast before you came here. And by the time we're done with worship, you're going to be hungry again.

[7 : 34] Three days and three nights fasting. You see this in verse number 16. After three days of fasting, Esther takes the next step.

But just think of the risks that she is facing. Now, 72 hours may not be enough to drastically alter her appearance.

But I suspect that after three days of not eating and drinking, it would have had a noticeable change in her appearance. And this is a risk, especially with King Ahasuerus, who we know puts a premium on beauty.

But in addition, we know from earlier in chapter 4 that Esther has not spent one-on-one time with the king in 30 days. But worse, worse than those 30 days, Esther has now been queen for five years.

Five years of deceiving the king about her Jewish identity. This is a risk.

[9 : 04] These are immense risks. Esther does not know what will happen. But if you notice her words at the end of verse 16, it certainly looks like she expects the worst.

Do you see that? I will go to the king, though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. Now, we use those words and we highlight those words.

I noticed that Kylie had these words highlighted in her Bible from the printer. It came printed this way. We highlight these words of Esther, if I perish or perish. And we sort of see that as like a rallying cry, you know?

Like, well, I'm going to go do it. And if I perish, I perish. I think it might be less than that in the context here. And I think it's more like I'm probably going to perish, but I have to take this chance anyway.

We get a little more of that in verse 1. Esther is brave.

[10 : 13] Undoubtedly, she is brave. And the author helps us to sense her courage and also her resignation to her fate, if you will. If I can use those words very carefully.

The author helps us sense her courage by using six words in verse 1 of chapter 5 that point to the king. And these words underscore the magnitude of the king's authority and also the great risk that Esther is taking and therefore her bravery.

Look at verse number 1. I'll point out these words by just popping up my fingers so you can spot them. On the third day, Esther put on what?

Royal robes. And she stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's quarters while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace.

What's that? That's the king's house. All of these words are heightening the sense of the risk that Esther is taking. The author wants us to know.

[11 : 27] The king is very powerful. And Esther's plan is very risky and full of unknowns. And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight.

If you're taking notes, you can jot down chapter 2, 15, and 17. Same words. Same words as we saw earlier. She won favor in his sight.

And he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

And the king said to her, What is it, Queen Esther? First time she's being addressed directly as Queen Esther.

I love that. What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? First, it shall be given to you even to the half of my kingdom.

[12 : 31] I wonder if the king is both puzzled and surprised by what has just happened. He knows the law. It's his law.

He knows that she should not be there. And yet there she is, right in front of him. What could motivate her? What could possibly motivate her to take this type of a risk, to appear in his presence uninvited?

What is her request? It must certainly be something huge. Or she would never take this chance. Perhaps he is intrigued as he asks, What is your request?

Up to half my kingdom. Now, this is a royal expression. He is not actually offering Esther 63 and a half provinces.

That's not the point here. The point that he's making is, He is inclined to be generous to her. I'm a generous king. And I will give you whatever you ask for.

[13 : 46] He's signaling his desire to be generous. It's like if Josh says to me, Look, I love you, man. And I would give you the shirt off my back. Now, I'm not actually going to ask him for his shirt, right?

The point is that he's inclined to be generous to me. Or if your mom says, What would you like for dinner? The sky's the limit.

Now, you know you're not going to get filet mignon, right? You're not going to probably get shrimp or anything like fancy lobster like that. You're getting something less than that. But she's trying to signal to you that she's inclined to be generous.

What would you like to have for dinner? Nuggets again? I can do chicken nuggets, right? She's being generous to you. Esther's plan is working out far better than she could have expected.

She is in the king's presence. She's not dead. Big win. And the king wants to be gracious to her. All she has to do now is point at Haman, the second in command, and say, Haman is trying to kill me.

[14 : 59] Haman's going to kill me. That's all she has to do. The big moment. Verse number four. And Esther said, If it pleased the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king.

Then the king said, bring Haman quickly so that we may do as Esther has asked. If you're taking notes, chapter 122, every man has already been ordered by the king to be master of his house.

But here, the king says, go get Haman quickly so that we can do exactly what Esther says. So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared.

And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king says to Esther, what is your wish? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.

Then Esther answered, my wish and my request is, if I have found favor in the sight of the king and if it pleased the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.

[16 : 28] Do you remember that story in the book of Matthew? When the daughter of Herodias dances before Herod.

And Herod is so pleased that he promises to give her anything that she asks for and then confirms his promise by making an oath to her.

But since mother knows best, the young girl asks for the head of John the Baptist on a serving platter.

Now Herod does not wish to execute John. But look what happens in verse number nine of Matthew 14. The king was sorry. But because of his oaths and his guests, he commanded it to be given.

When Esther first approaches the king's audience hall, the king offers to meet Esther's request. All she has to do is point at Haman and say, he's going to kill me.

[17 : 38] But Esther defers to the second half, right? It's Super Bowl Sunday. She defers. She defers to the banquet. She says, I'll tell you at the banquet.

And at the banquet, the king restates his willingness to be generous. And again, Esther defers to tomorrow's banquet.

What does Esther know? She knows that the king will ask for her request again tomorrow. And like Herod in Matthew chapter 14, after stating for the third time, how generous he is and how inclined he is to meet her request.

Esther knows the king will have no choice, but to grant this request. There is no way he could save face and refuse his queen after telling her how generous he is three times.

Esther wants the king to commit. And she wants Haman to get comfortable.

[18 : 48] She is not paralyzed by fear of the unknown. She is being wise. At the start of the chapter, we thought Esther might be dead by now, but she is not dead.

But she also has not revealed her reason for approaching the king. This is a bit of a cliffhanger, isn't it? Don't you want to know what's going to happen next? Don't you want to know the request?

Well, let's keep reading. Verse number nine. Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart.

What is happening here? I thought we were going to get the story of the next feast. Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, when he saw that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.

Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. And he sent and brought his friends and his wife, Zeresh. Haman is not well.

[20 : 12] He is not well. His ego is very fragile. He cannot ignore Mordecai, and he cannot tolerate Mordecai's failure to either respect him or fear him.

And so Haman seethes with anger. But he manages to hold it all together until he gets home. And then Haman unloads all of his wounded pride, starting in verse number 10.

Verse number 11.

Haman said, Even Queen Esther, let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king.

Haman has wealth. He has status. He has security. That's what we're supposed to get, I think, out of his 10 sons. He has wealth and status and security.

[21 : 37] He is the second most powerful man in the empire, honored by the king and the queen at a private banquet, and invited to another exclusive banquet tomorrow.

Haman is proud. Haman is proud. And he is petty. And when he sees Mordecai unbowed and unafraid, it crushes him like a spider on the sidewalk.

Look at verse 13. I can't even do his voice. It would be so awful. Yet, all this is worth nothing to me.

So long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Proud and petty.

Then his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows 50 cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it.

[22 : 59] Then go joyfully with the king to the feast. This idea pleased Haman. And he had the gallows made.

We hear gallows and we think hanging by rope, but that is not the way that the Persians executed people. The gallows here is likely a 75-foot stake in the ground.

Not the kind of stake that you eat. The other kind of stake. Like a giant tent peg. 75 feet tall.

Just for a bit of perspective. The Ferris wheel at Sheel's, 45 feet tall. This is a massive stake in the ground that he intends to impale Mordecai on.

Do you know what that means, kids? Impale? He's going to put Mordecai on the top of this stake to kill him. We know from archaeology that the columns supporting the king's audience hall were 69 feet tall.

[24 : 17] Haman is not content to execute Mordecai. He intends to publicly humiliate him on the tallest object in Susa.

Which ironically will ensure that everyone pays attention to Mordecai. Haman's desire to humiliate reminds me of Jesus' words in John 12.

Stick with me here. Jesus says this in John 12, When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear that idea of lifting up, when I am lifted up, I hear Jesus saying, when I am exalted, when I am recognized for who I am, when I am properly glorified, when I am the victor, when everyone knows me as the king, when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to me.

But look what Jesus, what John says next. He said this to indicate what kind of death he was going to die.

[25 : 50] He was about to die. Jesus is not talking about being exalted to a throne. He is talking about being exalted on the cross.

Crucifixion was shameful, reserved for the very worst of criminals. And yet Jesus says that when he is lifted up on the cross, humiliated on the cross, that he will draw all people to himself.

Before appearing, before King Ahasuerus, Esther puts on her royal robes. And before being crucified, Jesus is stripped of his clothing and humiliated.

And at the end of three dark hours on the cross, Jesus cries out in Matthew 27, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

What is going on here? In his humanity, Jesus feels God's rejection.

[27 : 11] He feels abandoned. He feels alone. And he knows that he is about to die. But in his humanity, Jesus did not know what death would be like.

He's never died before. We also are nervous about death, aren't we?

We don't know what comes next. But Jesus faces the unknown of death just after saying that God has forsaken him.

This is truly terrifying. How does Jesus respond to not knowing what death will be like?

How does Jesus respond to this truly terrifying thought that God has forsaken him and yet he knows that he is about to die? Peter tells us chapter 2 and verse 23, Jesus continued entrusting himself to the one who judges justly.

[28 : 44] And we see evidence of this. Just before Jesus dies, he cries out again, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

What is Jesus doing to the same one that he believes has abandoned him in his humanity to that same one, Jesus says, my life is yours.

Take my life and let it be. Into your hands I commit my spirit.

That, friends, that is faith. That's faith. God and because Jesus suffered and died for sins, God now extends his scepter to sinners like you and me.

I wonder, will you by faith reach out and touch that scepter that God has extended? He has reached out to you with grace in Jesus.

[29 : 54] Will you by faith respond by reaching out and touching that scepter, accepting grace, accepting forgiveness, accepting the righteousness of Jesus Christ for your sin?

Will you admit, Lord, I am a sinner and I don't even know how bad I am? That ought to make us afraid.

I'm a sinner and I don't know how bad I am, but I know that my sin deserves punishment, but Jesus loved me and gave himself for me.

chapter 5 began with a sense of foreboding, didn't it?

Esther's plan to appear before the king uninvited is risky and it is full of unknowns, but then the king welcomes Esther and states his desire to be generous to her and halfway through the chapter, things are looking great.

[31 : 09] we expect that the king will grant Esther's request at the banquet that is just right around the corner. But then our chapter ends with a fresh sense of foreboding.

Maybe Esther's delay wasn't so wise after all. With this giant stake already constructed, cousin Mordecai may be dead before Esther even has the chance to make her request to the king.

And except for the lovely Zeresh and her co-enablers, no one knows what Haman is up to this time. Not even Mordecai knows. How could God allow such a self-centered man to have so much control over his people?

I don't know. But it seems that nothing short of a miracle will save Mordecai's life. And I'm sure you've noticed we're short on miracles here in the book of Esther.

Do you remember those fears that we mentioned earlier? Fear of heights, fear of darkness, fear of sickness and spiders, fear of rejection? All of these unknowns make us afraid.

[32 : 29] And Esther has them too. But this didn't stop her in fear. Her unknowns didn't stop her in fear.

Esther stepped forward in faith. Fear is the natural outcome of not knowing. But there is another way.

And it's the way of Jesus. It's the way that Jesus models for us. We can use not knowing for faith growing. we can continue entrusting ourselves to the one who judges justly.

We can continue to entrust ourselves to God. Imagine that you are walking on a path at night.

And you have a flashlight in your hand. light. And let's just say for the sake of the story that it's better than those iconic red flashlights that you might get at the five dollar store.

[33 : 38] But not nearly as good as something that Josh probably has for when he goes to work. you've got a flashlight and it's able to produce a particular beam of light out in front of you.

But just a few steps ahead. What is just beyond that beam of light? Well, you don't know.

It could be a rock in your path. It could be a snake in the grass. It could be a sinkhole into a cave. that's very terrifying.

And you have a choice. You can let every unknown make you afraid, make you stop in your tracks, paralyze you with fear, refuse to take one more step forward.

That's an option. Or you can take the next step. And as you're holding this flashlight, what happens when you take the next step?

[34 : 46] Well, you can see just a little bit further, can't you? One more step, and you can see just enough ahead of you to keep going for another step and another step.

Faith is like walking with a flashlight in the dark. We only get to see a few steps ahead, and life is full of unknowns. What are we going to do?

We can freeze with fear, be paralyzed about decision-making, refuse to take another step, or you can take the next step.

And what happens when you do? One more step in the light. One more step trusting God. This is how faith, this is what it means to walk by faith.

faith. It doesn't mean that we have all of the answers. It doesn't mean that all of our unknowns have suddenly become knowns. It doesn't mean that all of the things that would naturally make us afraid have been dealt with, and the path is perfectly clear.

[35 : 57] Walking by faith is like walking in the dark with the flashlight. It is one day at a time, one step at a time, one moment at a time, trusting God for whatever is next.

Brothers and sisters, you can trust our father with every unknown in your life. Every unknown, you can trust him. When you don't see evidence of his work, you can trust him.

When you don't understand what he is doing, you can trust him. When you begin to doubt that he's doing anything at all, and that certainly starts to feel like what's happening here in Esther, doesn't it?

When you begin to doubt that God is doing anything at all. When life gets worse, even though you prayed that it would get better, and now you don't know at all what to do, you can trust our father with every unknown.

Our God is worthy of trust, even when life is overwhelming, terrifying, and filled with unknowns. Use not knowing for faith growing.

[37 : 14] Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Acknowledge his purpose, his glory, his will, his desire to work out all things for your good.

Acknowledge all of that, and then take the next step by faith. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful again for the privilege of being under your word.

Thank you for your kindness to give us this chapter, and to again see this twist in the story of Esther, to see Esther facing unknowns with courage and bravery.

Father, would you please help us to use our not knowing for faith growing. Help us not to be paralyzed by fear of the unknowns.

Help us to trust you with what's next. God's we ask that you would encourage us, that you would remind us of your goodness and your care for us, that you would give us wisdom for decision-making, that you would give us good counselors to help us make decisions, that you would cause us to be patient in prayer.

[38 : 44] prayer. And then, Father, would you please help us to take a step and to honor you with the growing kind of faith that we need to live in this world that is so full of unknowns.

We ask this for your glory and our good. In the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, amen.