

# The Proposal

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[ 0 : 00 ] and you can take out your Bible or your app, whatever you're going to use to follow along this morning, and you can get on over to the book of Esther and chapter 4.

Esther chapter 4. Kara is going to read for us this morning. Thank you, Kara. And she's going to read starting at verse number 1, and we're going to go down from verse number 1 this morning for her reading, down through verse number 4.

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

[ 1 : 19 ] Would you please help us as we continue in our time of worship to give our attention now to the preaching of your word, that our hearts might be reminded of who you are and what you have done for us in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we might be encouraged and motivated and confirmed to greater faith and greater works of faith.

Father, would you please help us, show us Christ, and speak to us those things that you have for us this morning. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

Imagine opening up social media on your device or your news app, whatever you use to consume news, and as you scroll, you notice this recurring headline.

Government declares National Day of Execution. You tap the headline, and you discover that by executive order, citizens are commanded to kill all persons of one ethnic group on a specific day about 11 months into the future.

How would you respond to this? Now, shock may cause some of us just to sort of shut down because we don't know how to deal with it.

[ 2 : 59 ] Privilege may enable a few of us to flee the country and just say, I want nothing to do with that. Perhaps you would join a protest or maybe a riot, depending if it got out of attention, to garner some kind of attention from the news media and to try to draw attention to what was happening.

Maybe you would self-medicate with drugs or alcohol or whatever it is that you turn to when you are stressed. Some of us, I suspect, would scroll past this headline because, after all, you can't read everything that you read on the Internet.

It doesn't affect me or my people group. And furthermore, this is 11 months in the future, so I'm just not going to worry about that today. And then I suspect that some of you would do whatever you can to care for and to protect others.

But now imagine that you are part of that ethnic group. You are scheduled for execution by the citizens of your own country on a day 11 months in the future.

How would you respond now? You can barely breathe, right? Your heart is racing. Your head is suddenly pounding. Your field of vision narrows, and you feel a little shaky.

[ 4 : 33 ] Your legs and your lips begin to quiver. Haman's malicious decree of death plunges the city of Susa into confusion.

I suspect that for both Jews and non-Jews, there was anxiety and fear. What am I going to do? How can I protect my family?

If the king authorizes this kind of brutality against them, what would ever stop him from doing that to me? Who is safe? Who is safe from the toxic cocktail of irrationality and authority?

When Mordecai learns what Haman has done, he responds by tearing his clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes and then wandering through the city, loudly crying out, right in the middle of the day.

He's not at all concerned that everybody sees this. Now this sounds a little strange to our Western ears, but both Jews and non-Jews in Persia would have been very familiar with this practice of putting on sackcloth and ashes and mourning and lamenting and crying out.

[ 5 : 50 ] Everyone would know that he was grieving. Think about when the Queen of England died and people from all over the Commonwealth and even all over the world grieved her passing and held candlelight vigils and mourners laid flowers at Buckingham Palace.

As the couriers spread out across the Persian Empire, Jews joined Mordecai in this great mourning with fasting and weeping and lamenting.

Verse number four. This reminds us that grief is real and relatable.

What I mean by that is you don't have to hide your grief. When you're grieving, you don't need to hide it. Be honest, even open and vulnerable if you can be.

Why? Because a community of gentle Jesus-like goodness will move towards those who are grieving.

[ 7 : 04 ] And that's the kind of community, the kind of church that we aspire to by God's grace, isn't it? Grief is real and relatable when you grieve and we all do sometimes.

Remember what we said to one another this morning in our call to worship. the Lord is nearer to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Esther hears about Mordecai and she is deeply distressed. Do you see that in your Bible? This is an interesting word. The Hebrew word means writhing or trembling.

When she just hears about what's going on with Mordecai and what he's doing, she is shaking in her boots, we might say. But perhaps due to her isolation in the harem, Esther is ignorant of Haman's decree.

So she tries to help by sending Mordecai clothing. But as you know, you don't just get over grief like changing your clothes.

[ 8 : 14 ] It doesn't work that way. Look at verse number four. When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed.

She sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was.

Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king and to beg his favor and to plead with him on behalf of her people.

Mordecai is such an interesting character, isn't he? He seems to always be in the know. Remember in chapter 2, he's the one who discovers this assassination plot against the king.

[ 9 : 43 ] Here, he seems to know everything that there is to know about this decree, maybe even something that he shouldn't have known, the exact sum of money, 300 tons of silver, 10,000 talents of silver, 300 tons of silver.

He knows that amount that Haman offered to give to the king as a bribe. And did you notice Mordecai also has receipts, as they say.

He has a written copy of the decree to give to Hathak in order to show Esther in case she doesn't believe him. Mordecai is interesting because he always seems to be in the know.

He's interesting for a second reason. It is because of Mordecai's command to Esther. It's recorded for us twice in chapter 2.

If you're taking notes, chapter 2, verse 10, and verse 20. It's because of Mordecai's command that no one knows that Esther's a Jew. He told her to keep it secret, to keep it safe.

[ 10 : 56 ] But now, did you notice at the end of verse 8, now Mordecai commands Esther to go to the king on behalf of who? her people.

Her people. Verse 9. And Hathak went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

Then Esther spoke to Hathak and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, all the king's servants and all the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law to be put to death except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live.

But as for me, I have not been called to come into the king these 30 days. Esther counters Mordecai's proposal with four reasons why it is impossible for her to go before the king.

First, it is against the law. It's against the law. If you show up uninvited to a wedding, I think they call that being a wedding crasher, is that right?

[12:23] If you show up uninvited to a wedding and you're trying to participate in the buffet line or whatever, you may be asked to leave the wedding. That would be an appropriate thing to happen to you if you show up uninvited to a wedding.

Now, if you show up without permission and just barge your way into the Oval Office, don't expect that you will be asked to leave. You will be arrested.

They will take care of you, I'm sure. But if you show up uninvited to the king of Persia, you don't get arrested. There's just one law, Esther says, and everybody knows this law.

You show up uninvited, you're dead. That's the law. The only exception to this law is if the king sees you approaching him and takes his scepter and extends his golden scepter towards you, then you can know that you have the king's favor and you are allowed to come towards him.

The first reason Esther counters Mordecai's proposal is because this is against the law. Second, second reason, her identity is a secret still.

[13:43] Right? Let's just assume that Esther goes before the king and let's assume that the king takes his golden scepter and extends his golden scepter to Esther. What is she going to say to him next?

Oh, by the way, thought you should know I'm a Jew and all of the Jews are about to be executed. She has to reveal her identity.

Otherwise, why does the queen of Persia care about this subset of the empire? Why does she care about this ethnic group more than any others? The third reason that Esther says or implies that she can't go before the king is because her leverage is limited.

Based on chapter 2 and verse 19, we suspect that the king has added more young, beautiful women to his harem.

It is highly unlikely that the king has been alone for the last 30 days. Mordecai hopes that Esther will use her relationship with the king, but Esther knows that the king's affection for her seems to have cooled.

[15:02] He seems to have lost interest in her. And so her leverage is limited. There's a fourth reason that I think is implied here.

With no questions asked, the king took off his signet ring and gave his signet ring to Haman. king. This is not a wise king.

Queen Vashti was disposed because of her disobedience. What do you think will happen to Esther when she reveals her deception?

This is an irrational, impulsive person that she is dealing with. The king is not trustworthy. From Esther's perspective, obeying Mordecai's command and appearing before the king uninvited is not just a proposal that has no merit.

This is an indecent proposal. It simply can't happen. There's just no way. So Esther sends Hathak back to Mordecai.

[16:15] Verse number 12. And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther.

Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place. But you, you and your father's house will perish.

And who knows? Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Mordecai's response to Esther contains a stern warning. Do you see it there?

[17:24] Don't assume that you will be excluded from this decree of death. We should ask, who is going to reveal Esther's identity?

identity. Well, the author doesn't tell us that. But Mordecai's response also includes a veiled threat.

Do you see it? Mordecai tells Hathak to tell the queen, you and your father's house will perish. Who will kill them?

Well, we don't know. The author doesn't tell us. But Mordecai's response also includes this confident promise. Do you see it? If Esther refuses to help, relief and deliverance will come from another place.

From where? Well, we don't know. The author doesn't tell us. But Mordecai's response also includes a hopeful hypothesis.

[ 18 : 38 ] Who knows? Who knows, Esther? Why couldn't it be true that you have come to this place at this time as queen of Persia in order to save your people?

think about all of the givens in Esther's life. Think about all of the events and the circumstances that have led up to this moment.

Given, given that she is still in Persia, even though the decree to go back to the promised land has already been issued and they are free to leave, they could have left years ago, but given that they didn't, and they are still in Persia, even though the Jews are free to return, given that her parents were killed, given that she was raised by Mordecai, given that she is beautiful, young, and a woman, given that she has been taken into the harem, but there in the harem, given that she wins favor with the eunuchs, and when it's her turn, given that she charms the king, and given that the king of Persia chose her to be the queen.

Mordecai's reasoning is like this, don't you see, Esther, don't you see all of these givens in your life, whether they are in your control, whether they are beyond your control, these events, these circumstances, these decisions have brought you to this defining moment.

Will you risk your life for the chance to save your people? to this point in the story, Mordecai has been the one commanding Esther to do certain things, but not anymore.

[ 21 : 03 ] Now Esther commands Mordecai. Look at verse 15. Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, go, go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa and hold a fast on my behalf and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day.

I and my young women will also fast as you do and then I will go to the king. Though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.

Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. Like Esther, we have no right to approach God.

His perfect law prevents us from entering his presence. And because of his holiness, he cannot extend to us his golden scepter to welcome us in.

We need a mediator. We need one who can appear in the presence of God on our behalf. God and there is one mediator between God and men.

[ 22 : 44 ] It is the man Christ Jesus. Esther resolves, I will go to the king.

And I love this little verse tucked in Luke chapter 9. Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. him. Resolved.

His mind was made up. His purpose was clear. He was not going to be dissuaded. Esther prepares to risk her life.

She says, if I perish, I perish. Jesus does not merely risk his life. He lays down his life in order to save his people.

Esther identifies with her people in their fasting. You fast and I will join you in this fast. But those sinless, Jesus identifies with his people in their sin.

[ 23 : 55 ] Through Jesus, you may have this relief and deliverance that Mordecai tells Esther about. Through Jesus, you may have relief and deliverance, relief from your guilt, relief from your shame, relief and deliverance from God's righteous judgment, from his wrath that will certainly fall on sinners because of their sin.

Who knows? Who knows? Why couldn't it be true? Why couldn't it be true, young one, that all of the givens in your life have led you to this moment right now today when the Spirit of God is at work among us here as his people convicting of sin, convicting of righteousness, convicting of the need of a Savior?

Who knows but that you have come to this defining moment in your life? Will you receive God's grace?

Will you believe in Jesus and be forgiven of your sins? Sisters and brothers, very few of our choices carry the importance of Esther's choice.

most of us will not face a decision in our entire lifetimes that affect the future of an entire empire. And yet, we all face defining moments, don't we?

[ 25 : 43 ] Some of us choose to live here, in Fargo, where it's cold. cold. You could live somewhere else, where it's warm, and there are finer restaurants, and better entertainment opportunities, and bigger careers to be had.

But here you are, in Fargo, at this time. Some of us, some of us grieve, us, because we have lost a loved one.

And that was a defining moment, and we are learning what it's like to now live life without that person in our lives that was so, so very meaningful, and so well-loved.

some of you have left churches because you realized you could no longer joyfully worship and humbly serve there.

What a defining moment that was. Maybe you've stood up for a student who was being bullied at school.

[ 27 : 00 ] Or maybe you spoke up, when everyone else around you was quiet and they were just going to allow something bad to happen, a prank, a joke, and you chose to speak up.

Perhaps you revealed something that others wish that you had kept secret, and now you wrestle with that decision and you wonder, did I really do the right thing?

Was that really my only option? What a defining moment for you. Maybe you acted with integrity, even though you had the means and the opportunity to win in a situation, whatever that situation was, but you chose by God's grace to act with integrity.

You chose the path of humility. you chose the path of gracious forbearance and gentle goodness. Maybe the job that you are working right now was never part of your plan, but by God's grace, you are finding your way there.

can I testify for a moment? When I left Ide Bailey in 2015, I never intended to return to technology consulting.

[ 28 : 37 ] And when God in his great kindness allowed us to plant a church in 2016, I was thrilled to serve and shepherd God's people.

This was my dream job, and I didn't even know that when I was a kid. This was my dream job. I thought I would have that dream job for the rest of my life, and one of my defining moments came in September of 22, when I resigned that job.

And on reflection, resigning was the easy part. Letting go of the job that I believe God equipped me for and gifted me for, that's the hard part.

God will to God as Mordecai says, who knows? Who knows?

Why can't it be true that I am at high point networks for such a time as this? Why can't it be true that God has you where he has you for such a time as this?

[ 30 : 06 ] Who knows? That's a hopeful hypothesis. Consider all of the givens in your life. Consider the events and the circumstances and the decisions that have brought you to where you are today.

Given your gender and your ethnicity, given your family and your extended family and the step family that you didn't ask for, given your singleness or your marriage or your divorce, given your health or your cancer diagnosis, given your social status, given your bank account, given your friend group and your church and your career, given the abuse and the injustice that you've endured, given your emotions and your intellect, given your faith, and given your deconstructing faith, given your skill and given your ability to do jobs in the workplace, given your wish for a life, anything other than the one that you are living right now, given your future that's still out ahead of you, and given your past, and given where you are right now, all of these givens are gifts.

They're gifts. Will you take all that God gives, the good, the bad, the ugly, will you take all of those givens that God gives gifts and steward them for his glory?

My brother, my sister, your life is not a series of unfortunate events, and Esther's was not either.

You did not arrive at this wrinkle in time by accident. moment. Who knows? Who knows?

[ 32 : 27 ] Why couldn't it be true that every given in your life has led to this defining moment? Like Esther, God has you where you are, as you are, for a reason.

You may not see that reason. But I promise you, it is a good reason. How can you be so sure?

Because all of God's purposes for his children are for their good.

Do we still believe that? So when you are facing defining moments, when you are facing choices, both big and small, when you face ethical dilemmas, and you're not sure what to do, when you face

situations that you caused, and when you deal with consequences because of the bad behavior of others, when you are staring down a decision that has no good options, no upsides, and there is no choice E, none of the above, will you trust God to take your ordinary faithfulness and use it to accomplish his good purposes?

When your defining moments come, will you glorify God with your givens? Let's pray about that together.

good father, we are grateful to receive your word. Holy spirit, thank you for moving among us. [ 34 : 22 ] as we have been together under the preaching of your word and under the powerful work of the Holy Spirit, we recognize that there is things in our hearts that need attention.

So Holy Spirit, would you please, as we quiet our hearts for a few moments, would you please comfort the brokenhearted? would you please encourage the weak?

Would you please warn those of us who are idle? Would you please, in your kindness, be patient with us? Would you draw us back, by repentance, to deeper faith in our Savior Jesus?

Good father, we receive the kindness and the graciousness of your word to us from Romans chapter 8. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ and we testify together, Lord Jesus Christ, you are our living hope.

All of our failures, you have dealt with them on the cross. All of our sins, you have taken care of it on the cross. All of our weakness, we recognize, is an opportunity to cling to and lean into and rest in your strength.

[ 36 : 05 ] Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being our living hope. We dare not, as we have sang together, we dare not fly from your cross.

Lord Jesus, keep us near the cross. Thank you for the privilege that we have in a few moments of celebrating the Lord's Supper together.

Father, would you please, in your kindness, move among us by your Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, would you please draw to repentance and faith, one who came this morning, not expecting to be confronted with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet here they are, and they understand in some way that something is happening in their heart and their mind and their conscience and their soul is being worked by the power of the Holy Spirit and by your word.

Holy Spirit, please grant life so that one among us responds by repenting and believing this gospel, oh, we will celebrate together.

We're so eager to see your work among us. Help us as we continue in our time of worship. Thank you for your kindness again. In Jesus' name, amen.