

Living Well in Turbulent Times

Good morning church! It is a privilege to be up here this morning, I want to thank Pastor Rob for this opportunity fill in for him while he is spending time with his family.

I want to be the first to welcome you to 2021! If you are joining us for the first time Text “GUEST” to the number on your screen. We would love to know you’ve joined us!

If you need someone to talk to on our Biblical Soul Care Team, text the word “TALK” and we will have one of our pastors on staff reach out to you.

My name is Robbie Isley, I am the Director of High School Ministries. I feel like my name needs a quick explanation, because the number one question I get is, “What do I call you?”

Why Robbie and why not Rob? First: There is already a Rob on staff and that name was taken.

Actually, growing up I was always Robbie. Friends, family, and church everyone called me Robbie.

When I went to college it began to change to Rob, and then in the workplace it was always Rob, but friends and family have continued to call me Robbie throughout. And now that my church is now my place of employment, Rob just got straight booted.

So now you have my permission to call me Robbie. It’s not weird.

Now that we have that down if you have your Bible go ahead and turn to Esther, chapter 4. While you are getting there, I want to give you a quick glimpse of who I am.

My wife and I moved here from Michigan shortly after being married in 2007.

I spent nearly 15 years working in sales and I have been here for a year and a half. I didn’t know what I wanted to do when I grew up until about a year and a half ago and that was be in youth ministry full time...

[pic slide] This is my family. My wife is Anna, and my four boys are Zak, Cade, Evan, and Ryker, and our dog Remi. Who is very much one of the boys.

That’s a snapshot of who I am, and I want to give you a snapshot of where we find ourselves in Scripture.

Before we dive into our text for the morning it’s necessary to give you a bit of context. We are diving into the climax of a story.

Our story is about Jewish girl who became a queen. Her name is Esther.

We find Esther, the Queen of Persia, married to King Ahasuerus. (You would probably recognize him better by his Greek name; Xerxes.)

The Jews were in Exile, away from their home.

Esther was taken as a girl because Xerxes banished his wife and needed a new one, so he did what any good sociopath would do and took all of the girls from his kingdom and then decided which one he like best.

That was Esther.

We enter into our passage just after it was made known that Xerxes was tricked into genocide. A man named Hamman tricked the king into declaring that all Jews should be eliminated.

We are entering in the middle of a long-distance conversation. Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, is telling her about a plot to wipe out the Jews. See, Esther is queen so Mordecai can’t just waltz up to the palace and demand to speak to the queen.

This is essentially an ancient Zoom Call.

Mordecai just told Esther that the Jews, her people, are in danger of being wiped out and told her she needs to talk to the king and get things straightened out.

Esther responds, if I do that, he is going to kill me. This is not a situation where a wife talks to a husband. If the king did not summon an individual it was punishable by death to approach him. Even for the queen.

Just a quick note; husbands...not a good practice.

Now that we understand the impending murder of an entire people group is on the verge, we can get a sense of the tension in the passage.

Let’s get to the text.

Once again, Esther 4. Starting in verse 13.

And this is where we pick up.

Then Mordecai told them (Them is referring to the messengers that are going back and forth between Esther and Mordecai) 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. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” 15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 “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. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

There is a lot going on here. Esther is being faced with a decision, on one hand, she is thinking to herself, ‘If I approach the king without being summoned, I’m dead.’

On the other hand, ‘If I don’t there will be a mass genocide of my people and I will probably end up dead anyway.’

From human perspective, this was very much a lose/lose situation.

Good thing God doesn’t always see things from our perspective. When we see a lose/lose God sees an opportunity to show his power and greatness.

He also gives us the opportunity to play a part in his plan. Just like Esther, we have the opportunity to play a role in God’s plan.

Which brings us the first way we live well in turbulent times.

- **Choose to be Used (v. 13-14)**

This is a very christianese type of phrasing, but it literally means, choosing to play a part in God's plan.

That's great...what is God's plan?

In a broad sense, God's plan is the redemption of his people. He allows us to play a part in his plan of redemption. When you share the gospel, when you openly talk about your faith, when you walk across the street and engage in conversation with your crazy neighbor. You are carrying out God's plan.

We are literally the avenue in which God has chosen to use to advance his kingdom.

When king Xerxes was tricked into declaring an edict that would murder the Jews what he didn't realize was that his queen was a Jew herself.

Back in those days when a king made an edict it could not be reversed. He couldn't come out and say "just kidding, I just found out my wife is a Jew!" He definitely wouldn't say he was tricked because then his reputation and clout would have been damaged and risk losing his power.

There was no political flip-flopping.

Look back at verses 13

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, *"Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape anymore than all the other Jews."*

If we die, you will too. Mordecai reminds her that her circumstance, her position cannot and will not save her from this – he was imploring her to act!

I want to give you three practical reasons to show you why, as God's people, we need to choose to be used.

First.

Choose to be used: Or miss out! (14a)

Miss out on being playing a part in God's plan.

Look at the first part of verse 14. *"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place..."*

He was imploring Esther to act, God was going to protect the Jews, but if she didn't choose to be used then God would find another way.

Esther had a decision to make. She could choose to do nothing, or she could choose to be used.

If she chose to do nothing, she would miss out on being a part of God's work. She would miss out on bringing glory to God. She would miss out on being a part of God's plan.

It reminds me of a time when Anna and I had a decision to make. We had been living in Iowa for about three years; see we are both from Michigan and desperately wanted to go back.

When Anna got pregnant with Zak, our oldest son.

We decided that we were going to move back home because, 'why wouldn't God want us to be by our family while raising our own family?'. This was our plan from the beginning, and it was time to bring it to fruition. No matter what.

So, we tried Michigan for a year and decided together that God wanted us back in Iowa, so we moved back.

God had a plan for my life, for Anna's life, for our family's life. We prayed hard because we wanted to be a part of God's plan.

I don't think God had a desire to keep us from our family, but his desire to use us and where he wanted to use us is here, in Iowa.

We had to answer the question, "Are we willing to make the hard decision to be a part of God's plan?"

That's the same question you need to ask yourself. Are you willing to make the choice to be a part of God's plan, or are you going to sit by and miss out?

God has a plan for our lives, at that time we didn't know what it was, we thought it was Michigan, but in reality, his plan was to have us here. His plan was for us to enter into High School ministry.

We didn't want to miss out. We didn't want to miss out on his blessings in our life. Miss out on the Spiritual growth. Miss out on our church.

God is moving in this place and we wanted to be a part of it. So we chose to move back.

Another part of this act of choosing to be used is:

Choose to be used: Or suffer the consequences. (14b)

Look back at the middle of verse 14. Mordecai reminds Esther that her decision will have consequences.

He says, *"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place,"* here it is *"but you and your father's house will perish."*

Esther is presented with a life changing situation it was intense, she could clearly see the consequences of her actions. Whether she chose to act or she chose to do nothing the result was laid out in front of her.

Can you imagine that kind of pressure? The weight of thousands of lives hangs in the balance, based off of one decision. Your decision.

However, don't let the extreme nature of her circumstance distract you from the reality that all decisions carry consequences, even the small ones. When you make the choice to do nothing then God makes the choice to not use you.

I'm not talking about losing salvation, I'm talking about missing out on God's blessings in your life.

Missing out on the opportunity to introduce someone to Christ. To pour into the next generation.

Right here. Right now. I don't know, just an idea...maybe look into serving in High School or Jr. High Ministry.

God wants to allow us to play a part in his redemptive plan, God doesn't save us to sit. He saves us to serve!

Don't get me wrong. Serving has an opportunity cost. It does. Time, money, emotion.

Sometimes that cost is high, sometimes not so high.

When Anna and I made our decision to move back to Iowa the cost was extremely high. We were leaving our family. Family we loved and family we were very close to, but to be a part of God's plan and the opportunity to be a part of the work he continues to do here has proven that it was the right decision.

As hard as it was.

God gives us the opportunity to be used by him. He gives us the opportunity to help further his kingdom!

The cost for doing God's work may seem huge sometimes, but as Paul says in Romans 8:18 *"the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed in us."*

There is no comparison.

Then, choose to be used:

- **Or neglect your purpose (14c)**

Neglect your purpose, meaning God has placed you here and now for a reason. For a purpose.

Look at the last part of verse 14.

Mordecai says, *"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

Mordecai is reminding Esther that there are no accidents, that God has orchestrated this whole situation. He chose to put Esther in a position of influence.

This one sentence is an awesome reminder that God doesn't make mistakes and no matter your circumstances you have the opportunity to be a part of his plan.

Once Anna and I moved back and settled in the question of "now what?" came up.

We chose to move back, to be a part of what God was doing, what did that mean??

It meant he wanted us to continue to be faithful. I spent two years working at a job that made me sick every morning walking through the front doors. I questioned what was happening.

Then I moved into working in hospice. It was a great job, I worked with great people, and was able to work with one of my greatest friends for 6 years, but it was still sales. I still didn't feel I was fulfilling my purpose.

Early on I questioned what I was doing in life. I made sales work, but it drained me, for 15 years total it drained me. I tried to get out. Interviewed, looked, prayed to get out.

God was teaching me to be patient, he was working behind the scenes. Maturing me for ministry. Having 4 boys at home had a funny way of maturing me and keeping me young at the same time.

He set me in this life here and now for a specific reason and God did the same for you.

I want to encourage you to remember that God placed you right here, right now, for a purpose. It wasn't happenstance that you ended up living through 2020.

God planned for all of us to be where we are and when we are. What are you going to do with that?

Be a part of his plan today, tomorrow, share the gospel with someone, find somewhere in the church to serve.

What if in 2021 we, as believers in Jesus Christ, fulfilled our purpose of spreading the good news of Jesus and decided to serve in this church? Can you imagine the impact we would have on our community, on the next generation?

What if this is a year of hope and expectation? Not because of the hopeful end of a pandemic, but because God had a plan when he decided to place you here. When he decided to place you now, and you choose to be a part of his plan?

Moving a bit quicker now.

- **Don't struggle alone [v 15-16a]**

Look back at the text with me.

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 "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."

Esther made the decision that she was going to approach the king. She understands the consequences.

Esther knew deep down that there was no way out aside from God intervening.

For all intents and purposes, she should be killed for seeing the king without being asked and her people were facing genocide by the hand of one of the king's trusted officials.

What did she do? Esther asked her uncle to gather all of God's people and fast.

The act of fasting is a very pointed way to get our attention on God. It's saying to God 'you are all I need. Without you everything falls apart.'

The text doesn't say exactly what the specifics of their fasting were, but from the text we can logically conclude they were praying for Esther's protection.

They leaned on God together. As a community and as a family.

I want to tell you one last bit of my story. This is a personal example of God's people crying out to him on behalf of my family.

When Anna was 19 weeks pregnant with Evan...third oldest child we went in for a routine ultrasound. The ultrasound came back with bad news. Evan had swelling around his brain, only one kidney, and an unidentified mass in his abdomen. We were presented with the stark reality that there was a chance Evan may not make it full term. We may never get to meet our baby boy.

We were then scheduled for another ultrasound at the University of Iowa one week later.

Immediately we called family back in Michigan and as many people as we could think of here in Iowa and asked them to pray along with us for our unborn baby. And they did.

We gathered God's people and asked them to pray for Evan. We didn't struggle through this alone.

Without our church family I don't know how we would have made it through. We leaned very heavily on the love and encouragement that surrounded us.

The importance of a church family became very clear to us. This church was the physical representation of the love God has for us and specifically Evan.

We needed our church and whether you acknowledge it right now you need your church too.

That's what it means to be a church. To love and be in community together.

Not a perfect group of people that know the right thing to say at the right time, but a group of fallen people saved by grace who are willing to step into the mess of life and help you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

That's the church!

Lastly to live well in turbulent times is to:

- **Trust God's sovereignty (v. 16b)**

Look back at the last part of our text for this morning.

Esther informs Mordecai, *"Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."*

Esther decided that she was not only going to act, but she was going to trust God's sovereignty. She trusted that God had everything under control.

But notice, her circumstance didn't change. God didn't change the king's heart and make him reverse the edict. No, the circumstances stayed as they were.

God very well could have used Esther's death to spur a revolt of the Jewish nation, preventing the genocide. He could have had some other event planned out that included Esther's death.

The personal danger remained.

The people of God knew that He had the power to change everything. He could have wiped away the edict, He could have ended the king, he could have even used Esther's death.

Esther trusted that no matter what happened, God is still good.

The Scripture is clear that God hears the cry of his people. He hears their request, and this is a perfect example.

To save God's people would take a divine action.

Esther understood the risk, if she approached the king without being summoned, she could be put to death.

She decided to do the right thing anyway.

She realized that, but still cried out to God, trusted his sovereignty, and followed through with her decision to go in front of the king, even if it meant she died.

During Anna's pregnancy with Evan, we got to the point where we had to trust God. We prayed for healing, we prayed for a healthy baby boy, but we also recognized that was not guaranteed.

We got to the point where we decided that God is still good, even if he didn't heal Evan.

We knew in our hearts that God would provide for us. If Evan didn't make it through the pregnancy, we believed God would give us the strength to make it through.

If Evan were born with health challenges, we trusted God would give us the capacity to love and care for him. We trusted.

By God's grace Evan was healed in the womb. God heard the cries of his people and healed our baby boy. The swelling in his head disappeared, the mass was still there, but not dangerous and God would later grow him a second kidney.

If you have met Evan you know, and if you haven't met him you will quickly realize that he is one of the most joyous people you will ever meet, not only did he heal Evan, but God also blew our socks off.

Evan can't help but smile...he even smiles through tears when he's in trouble. His laugh is contagious, and his hugs are amazing.

Maybe this isn't your experience though. Maybe you're sitting here this morning with a marriage that's in shambles. Maybe you just lost someone close to you. And God doesn't seem like he's in control.

He doesn't always answer the way we ask, but he does answer.

God's perspective is not always ours, but He is good, even though what we see sometimes looks and feels ugly.

As you go through the upcoming days and weeks remember that God has placed you here in this time and in this place for a reason.

He gives us the opportunity to make the choice to be used by him.

He has given us a family to work through struggles with.

And He is good, and we can trust he has everything under control.

If you want to know the ending of the story, I encourage you to read the book of Esther. It's only 10 chapters and well worth the read!

Let's pray.