

It's Time to Arise
Esther 4:12-16

Good afternoon! I hope you feel comfortable where you're sitting right now. But don't get too comfortable because I'm going to preach and I don't want you to sleep on me. Especially this is siesta time.

We're on the third part of our six-part series we're calling "Arise and Shine". We're talking about how we live in a time when our faith and our strength and our resolve are being tested. We're talking about how we can keep on moving on, moving forward, despite obstacles that are on our way and how to keep looking to Jesus who is faithful and the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is his church and he is the one who is going to keep it. Amen?

Now you remember the story of Esther. She was a young Jewish woman living in Susa about 500 years before the time of Christ, and she lived there not too far from the palace where King Xerxes was, and King Xerxes had a falling out with his wife and was looking for a new queen. So they had all the young girls come from the whole Persian kingdom, and they all took about twelve months of spa treatments, and they held a beauty pageant where King Xerxes was the judge. In the end, the King chose Esther as the most beautiful and most appealing and she found favor with the King. So, she became the new queen, Queen Esther. This everyday Jewish girl who had been orphaned as a child, raised by her cousin, Mordecai, is now the wife of one of the most powerful men in the whole world at the time, the king of the whole Persian Empire. Persia is the modern-day Iran.

So she's the queen, and before long her cousin, Mordecai, comes to the gate of the city and he is there in sackcloth, torn clothes and wailing. Her friends say to her, "Hey, your cousin who's taken really good care of you, he's out there and something's really wrong." So she says, "Go, find out."

And the attendants go to Mordecai at the gate, and he says, "A horrible thing has happened. The king has signed an edict and all of the Jews are going to be killed on this certain date in the entire Persian Empire." So he sends a copy of the edict and says, "Show this to Esther. It says, 'Kill, annihilate and destroy every man, woman, young, old, the children, everyone is going to be killed, everywhere.' But you can help us by speaking to the King and begging for mercy."

And Esther reads it and then sends back a note that says, "Oh, I'd love to help, and I know you want me to go to talk to the king about this, but you don't understand. No one can approach the king without being called, without being summoned; and he hasn't asked for me in 30 days. So if I just go walk up to him when he is having court, I'll die. They'll put me to death, and the only exception is if he holds out his royal scepter. So you see, this is really not a good plan because the risks are way too high. I could lose everything."

And then Mordecai sends a note back to Esther because he is a man of the times and really understands what's going on and he wants to get some action done. So let's look at this key passage in Esther 4:12-16. Please open your Bibles...

"When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?' Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'"

I want you to take note of that phrase “for such a time as this”. Mordecai was saying, "Esther, you have a divine moment directly in your path. Don't miss it." And could it be that you have a divine moment directly in your path right now, you just didn't know it? You just haven't been able to see it, but God brought you here today so that you could have your spiritual eyes opened to really see the divine opportunity that's in your path, that opportunity when you take a step of faith forward into it and it takes you to a whole new level of God's favor and blessing.

There are four things we learn from this passage on how to see your divine moments and how to seize those divine moments. Now, those divine moments are usually characterized by difficulty, by confusion, by not knowing what to do. I'd like to share with you what you can do when those divine moments come into your life.

1. RISE UP IN PRAYER

When you're in a difficult time, when you're in troubled times, it's time to rise up in prayer. Let's see what Esther does upon recognizing the dangerous time she was in. In Esther 4:15 it says,

"Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king.'"

Esther understood the times. She called for a fast, a three-day fast, because she knew how serious the situation was. Of course, that fast was accompanied by prayer. She knew that it was time to rise up in prayer, and you rise up in prayer by falling to your knees, but so many times we try to get through those obstacles in our lives in our own strength.

We try to get through the problem with our own power when all we have to do is fall to our knees and then God will raise us up over those obstacles and God will smash through those problems and barriers in our lives.

So why don't we pray more? And fast more?

a. We forget how powerful God is.

We forget how big and great God is, the God who created the infinite universe with the power of his word. It was all done. We forget that the one who put the stars in space is right there waiting for us to pray to Him, waiting to answer our requests. You see there's no problem in your life right now that's too big for God to handle.

b. We forget how much God cares.

The Bible says God cares about everything in our lives, every detail. It says He even has every hair on your head numbered or what's left of it. In Luke 12:7 we read, “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” He also says he counts every tear that you've ever cried. In Psalm 56:8, we read, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” God knows everything about you. Maybe no one else knows or cares, but God does. There's no problem in your life too small for God to care about.

c. We forget that no battle is won without prayer.

The third reason that we don't pray and fast more is because we don't realize that prayer and fasting wins battles. You see, our real enemy is the devil, the original serpent who wants to destroy us. He would throw anything at us to keep us off-balance in order to stop us from praying. It doesn't mean though that everything that happens to us is caused by the Devil. If you got the flu, I hope you took Tamiflu and did not blame the devil.

I remember years ago when I was a missionary in training. We all gathered one afternoon to pray and then somebody asked to be prayed for because she had LBM. And someone started to pray and started to cast out the spirit of diarrhea. And he railed against the devil and all demons he could think of. The problem is there are folks who give the devil credit more than what he deserves or they talk to the devil and demons more than they do to God.

Esther realized after Mordecai's message to her that she needed to put all her fears and doubts into God's hands. She was afraid to go to the King but then she realized that there's a King in heaven who's sovereign and truly in control. She called for a three-day fast. She was that fearful and nervous. And we know what happened. God moved. What was impossible became possible. The king welcomed her and listened to her. She won the battle because of prayer and fasting.

I don't know what battle you're fighting. I don't know the challenges you're facing. But I know God who is faithful will fight for you. Just put all your fears, doubts, and anxieties into his hands. Then pray and, if possible, fast and hang on to him.

I want you to see, though, a second thing. It's not only time to rise up in prayer, it's time to also

2. RISE UP FOR MY CONVICTIONS.

Now there's a difference between a belief and a conviction. A belief is something you hold to. A conviction is something that holds you to your core. You can't let go of it because it won't let go of you. It's embedded in your soul. In Esther 4:16 she says,

"When this is done, [that is all the prayer and fasting] I will go to the King even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Note that phrase “if I perish, I perish”. Esther was willing to put her life on the line, to die if she must, because of her conviction that millions of people’s lives should not perish.

You see, conviction means being convinced about the certainty or rightness of a matter. In fact, to have conviction about something is to be willing to die for it. Nothing or no one can ever change your mind.

Do you remember the story of the young lady at Columbine High who was asked by the killer while pointing a gun at her, “Do you believe in God?” She said, “Yes,” and was promptly shot and killed. This girl was convinced that Jesus was more important than saving her life. This girl’s conviction was as strong as the conviction of the early Christians who’d rather be eaten by lions in the coliseums of Rome than deny their Savior.

Somebody once told me we only really believe the things that we do. Everything else is just religious talk, and I think that's so true. I mean we say God is first. But if He's not first in my schedule or in my finances or in my relationships, those things that are important to me, He's really not first. That's just religious talk, and the world is sick of religious talk. They're tired of having sermons preached at them. They want to see one lived out in front of them and then they'll take notice.

We live in a time when real conviction is demanded of Christians. Because we live in a society where people just go with the flow. They say, “Whatever is good for him, is good for me”. If they think that makes them happy, so be it.” “To each his own”. “There is no absolute truth.” The last statement is quite ridiculous and contradicting. Because if that statement is true then there is absolute truth. Anyway, because of such statements, we see an increase in immorality, in disrespect, in violence and in disregard for life.

A lot of couples live in, there is pre-marital sex, there are adulteries, there's abortion, there's same-sex marriage, and there are shootings in schools. This is a messed-up world we live in. Well, it has been like this since the fall of Adam and Eve. But, throughout the ages, men and women of conviction like Moses, Abraham, Jeremiah, Esther, Paul, and, of course, Jesus, stood for their beliefs and made a difference in people's lives.

We live in a time wherein we need to rise up for our convictions. Shall we do that?

So, we need to rise up in prayer. We need to rise up for our convictions. And thirdly, we need to

3. RISE UP IN GIVING.

Some of you are going, "Uh-oh. Here it comes." No, no, don't be afraid. I'm not going to talk about what you think I'm going to. That will be for next week. So, yeah, it's coming. But wait for a week.

In Esther it says, "When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish.'" (Esther 4:12-14a)

Note that word arise in that last sentence. Arise. Esther got the chance to arise, to stand up and make a difference in her generation, but Mordecai told her, "Hey, make no bones about it. You have a great opportunity, but if you don't take it, somebody else will be used because God will be God and His purpose will prevail and the Jews will be rescued. But there is an opportunity here that you could be a part of, and it's our time to arise. We get the chance to be a part of what God is doing in our day and our time."

In Luke 9:24 (GNT) Jesus says, "For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it."

Jesus is saying that if you hold on to your position and your possessions and your protection, you hold on tightly to everything around you and try to make yourself feel secure, then you'll lose it. Nothing in this world is permanent. You have to value things that have eternal significance. What's unseen is eternal and more important.

Jim Elliot was a missionary to Ecuador and was killed by the savage group that he was trying to reach. Later that same group came to know Christ because of his example.

One of Jim Elliot's well-known sayings is this, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose."

The great irony is that the things that we hold on the tightest, we can't keep. We don't keep anything. But the things that we give to God, the things we let go of, He takes and uses and we get to be a part of what God is doing in our church, in our world, in our time, in our day.

Esther had this choice in her defining moment. She could hold on, and she was tempted to hold on to her position and all her possessions and the security she had, but Mordecai said, "If you hold on to it, you're going to lose it all, but if you give it all away, then God is going to do a miracle. If you give it all away then you'll get it back and so much more."

In the end, Esther chose to lay her life on the line. And this brings us to the last point I'd like to make.

4. RISE UP TO SERVE.

In Esther 4:14, Mordecai says, "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

That is a thought-provoking question. In fact, Mordecai is like saying, “Can we count on you?” And the answer would be a life-changing one. For Esther, that meant thinking about her purpose in life. Why did God create me? Why was I placed in the royal palace? Why was I chosen by the King out of all the many other beautiful girls who were not Jewish? Why did the King allow me to enter the inner court without being punished? What am I doing in the palace at this most crucial point in my people’s history?

In point #1, I already talked about Esther’s decision to talk to the king in response to Mordecai’s plea. That decision was not easy. But she knew she had to obey God. She realized that God had engineered the circumstances in her life. And by consciously aligning her will with God’s will, she became a blessing to her people and she discovered her purpose in life.

Like Esther, we may find ourselves asking what we are doing in a certain place or why we are in a certain situation at a particular point in time. When we think back there seems to be a trend. So we say, “There must be a reason why I’m here. There must be a reason why I’m doing this.” Because sometimes the events leading up to where we are seem to be inexplicable and yet they seem to follow a pattern. Have you ever thought of something like that?

Like when I met my wife. Do you know we are 15 years apart? She’ll be 30 next Saturday. So, I came to the US when I was 30 and she was just a high schooler in the Philippines and no way she could come here because they didn’t have the means. But she got the brains. In short, when she was 22 she was sent by her company to the US because she was smart. She landed in Minneapolis, Minnesota and worked there for Northwest Airlines through a contracting company. I was living in Jersey City, NJ, enjoying life as single person. I was also a Bible student at the time.

Then, a church in Brooklyn called me to be their pastor and I started to enjoy life as a single pastor.

Minneapolis to Brooklyn is about 1200 miles. No way she'd come here or I would go there. No reason why we would travel. Then, 9/11 came. Northwest suffered losses due to people not wanting to travel anymore by air. Northwest ended its contract with Anabel's company. Instead of sending her back to the Philippines, they sent her to Yorktown Heights in...upstate New York. Yorktown Heights to Brooklyn is about an hour's drive. But no way she would go to Brooklyn or I'd go to Yorktown Heights. I've never even heard of it. Until she showed up in church one Sunday. How did it happen? It so happened that her close friend in the Philippines is the niece of a member in our church who happens to be a friend of mine. In short, her friend asked her to get in touch with her aunt. So, this aunt invited her to church and the rest is history. And that's when I realized that God's purpose for me was not to enjoy life as a single pastor but to be fulfilled as a married pastor.

I'm pretty sure you have your own stories to tell how the Lord brought you and your spouse together. My point is, God is in control of our lives and our circumstances. We may not understand what's happening at the moment, in your life and even in the church, but he will reveal it in time. As I said last week, God doesn't want us to understand. He just wants us to obey. Our minds are not even capable of understanding if he revealed it to us right away. He takes us step by step so that our faith in him may be built up and our character may be strengthened. There's a song whose lyrics go:

“So when you don't understand

When you don't see His plan

When you can't trace His hand

Trust His Heart.” Trust his heart.

Anabel and I were living comfortably in NY until suddenly the Lord uprooted us, so to speak, and brought us here. We didn't understand it at first but we trusted his heart. After a year the Lord revealed to us he wants us to serve in this church. It came at a time when Pastor Romy and Tita Kaye decided to leave the church to become missionaries.

So, I believe each one of you was brought here to this church for a purpose. It is no accident that you're here, that you're still here. At this time in the life of our church, I believe God has called you to step up to the plate, to lend your gifts and talents, to serve him with what you have, however small it may be. God has given each of us a spiritual gift that should be used for his glory and to build up his people. **1 Peter 4:10 says, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”** So, the question is, “Can the church count on you?”

I'm glad that some of our young people are answering the call. They're getting involved and I'm really happy to see them serve. Like Jobelle, and Liana, and Ate Irene, and RJ. I even heard that Sam and Ianna will be serving, too. And Jonathan as well. Who's next? Maybe Eze and Jacob. They'll play the piano and the drums.

The church needs you at this time. You can contribute in your own little way. It doesn't have to be big and visible. It can be as simple as folding the bulletin or cutting the sermon outline, or sharing food or welcoming guests. God can see every bit of service you do for him. As long as it is done in the name of Jesus, God is pleased and glorified. **Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

Folks, these are challenging times. And God challenges us to arise and shine. Let us rise up in prayer. Rise up for our convictions. Rise up in Giving. And Rise up to Serve. This is not the time to look back and regret. This is the time to move forward and keep doing what the Lord wants us to do for him. This is not about me or any individual, this is about the church of God which will continue to march on despite ourselves. For Jesus says the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

We're now meeting in a different place, a different location. Is this where God wants us? I don't know. God will make it clear in the days ahead. But I believe he has a plan and purpose for this church. I believe he has a plan and purpose for you that's why you're here. And I want us to be united. To be of one mind and one spirit. Let's leave the past behind and look forward to a better future. **Isaiah 43:18-19** says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Do you believe that?

Folks, it's time to arise and shine! Can the church count on you?