

~Other Speakers A-F: Brent Barnett:

The book of Esther, though it never even mentions the name of God, is clearly about the sovereignty and providence of God in each of our lives. Esther, an orphan child, was adopted by an older cousin named Mordecai. When the King of Persia dismissed Vashti from being Queen, he held a beauty pageant of sorts to find a young woman who would most delight him. Esther, being beautiful, was selected, though she didn't reveal that she was Jewish. She won the favor of the king and became Queen. A man named Haman was promoted in the king's court, and he decided to make the kingdom bow down to him, obviously being on a power trip. Mordecai refused, and thus Haman hated him and wanted him killed. Haman plotted to have all of the Jews killed, and Mordecai communicated the predicament of the nation of Israel to Esther. In Esther 4:14 he says, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" Mordecai had keen insight into the nature of God. He knew that God would preserve the nation of Israel one way or another because God had promised to make Israel a great nation and bless the rest of the earth through it (Genesis 12:1-3). Thus, his advice to Esther was that maybe God would spare the nation through her. Maybe God had given her great beauty and her position of royalty so that she could be the means through which God would accomplish His will.

Mordecai was a clear believer in the sovereignty and providence of God, for he looked for God's working over their lives and in their circumstances. Yet he was not a believer in fate as if they could stand by and do nothing. Sure, God would preserve Israel one way or another, but Esther and Mordecai had a choice to make. Would they experience the blessing of God as He delivered the nation through their faithfulness, or would they, particularly Esther, fail to be strong in the moment which God had ordained for them? This was Esther's chance to make a choice that would impact the history of an entire people and nation. This was her time and her chance, for God had ordered the circumstances of her life for such a time as this.

What we must understand is that Esther is just like us. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Esther's God is our God. Israel was His people, and now we, as believers in Christ, are His people. How God worked in Esther's life is how God desires to work in our lives. We may not be as good-looking as Esther, we may never have won a beauty pageant, and we may not be in a position of power, let alone a Queen of the most powerful nation on earth. Yet, God oversees the events of our lives just as He did the events in Esther's life. Psalm 139:16 says, "And in Your book were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them." From even before we were conceived in our mother's womb, God had a plan for our lives. He knew how He would gift us, what opportunities we would have or the lack thereof, and all of the details of each and every day of our lives. Ephesians 2:10 explains, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Might it be that there is an intentional connection between how God makes us and the works which He ordains for us? I believe that there is. I believe that God has a specific plan for our lives that provides the opportunities for us to harvest the gifts, abilities, and opportunities that He has given us. I believe that He works in the details, ordering circumstances, and establishing our steps (Psalm 37:23). Our calling is to do as Esther did, yielding to the providential hand of God in her life. She didn't ask for her beauty, nor did she earn it. She didn't ask to be an orphan, nor did she have any control over the fact that she was adopted by Mordecai, evidently a God-fearing Jew. She had no influence over the fact that the king removed the former queen and desired her above all of the other virgins of the land, even though she was a Jew. These were events clearly ordained by God, and she simply cooperated with the hand of God.

God has good works prepared for each of us to do. He wants to use us. In fact, as 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." The question is whether or not we are usable vessels. Esther was humble enough to listen to Mordecai, courageous enough to risk her life for the sake of her fellow Jews, and obedient enough to God to influence the king as she knew she could. She exercised her ability to choose in partnership with the providential hand of God. Thus, she is known the world over as the woman who had the courage to do what was right at her God-appointed time. We need to want to be used, and we need to be looking for God's sovereign hand to see where and how we are to serve Him.

I believe that there are many times in life, even daily, where God has providentially worked "for such a time as this." Sometimes we get stuck waiting for some dramatic moment where we come through in the clutch and do something great for God. God's call to us is to be faithful in the ordinary everyday things, for even these are ordained by Him purposefully as He provides good works for us to do. We don't know when God will call on us to make a hard decision or to step out in faith in a way that many are impacted by our decision. But we will

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be much more likely to stand strong in such a moment if we have been standing strong all along. We will be much better able to discern the will of God in a time of crisis if we have been seeking Him all along. We must view our lives as those over which God is sovereignly orchestrating circumstances for the purpose of accomplishing His will and advancing His kingdom in and through us.

Esther's life wasn't mere coincidence or fate. It was a cooperating with the God Who ordained it all. Indeed, God has made us all for "such a time as this."