

SENT//“Appointed”//Esther 4:13-16

Favorite all-time stories is of a college student named Larry from out West who was a little bored with his life and so bought 48 army weather balloons and attached them to a lawnchair...

- His ambition was to “set out to observe the neighborhood from a slightly different angle”
- His plan was to shoot balloons when he got to the right altitude
- After a Jack Bauer-esque rescue, they asked him, “Why did you do it?”

There’s something in some of us that understands that. Maybe you’re in high school or college, and you don’t just want to live the life of your parents... you want a life that counts... or maybe you’re more established in your career, and recently you’ve begun to think of life differently and now you’re starting to wonder how to leverage your life so that it counts for eternity... Sometimes people say to me, “Wow, Pastor, if I had understood some of these things earlier... I might have made different choices about my career... So how do I take the rest of my life and leverage that for God’s Kingdom?”

Or, “I’m in a secular profession... but I feel really good about where I am because this is what I’m good at. What does that mean? Am I just like a 2nd class Christian because I’m not in the ministry?” (In Christian circles there are often “classes” (regular people; pastors; then on top you have missionaries... they are 1st class, Navy Seals). Is that me? Am I 3rd class? Is my main role just to give you money so you can do ministry? I’m going to show you that is all wrong.

We’re going to start a 3-week study reflecting on how you are supposed to see your life, and the world. I’m going to call this mini-series “SENT.” That’s a word we use a lot around the Summit Church

because it is something that should characterize every believer. This is how Jesus described himself 44x in the Gospel of John), and then it is what he said would characterize all of His followers. He said, “If any person would follow me, then how I am sent He’ll be sent.” SENT. Listen, being *sent* is not the special calling of a sacred few, it is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Unless you know how you’re sent, you’re not a disciple.

Today I want to help you realize that the details of your life—your gifts, your opportunities, even the pain of your past, has been sovereignly appointed to you by God, with the responsibility to leverage them for all they are worth for the Kingdom.

So, Esther... Esther 4: Let me tell you Esther’s story by summarizing for you Esther 1–3

- The story takes place in modern day Iran. At that time the kingdom was called Persia, and the capital city where Esther lived was called Susa. Today that city in Iran is called “Shush,” like, “be quiet.”
- The year is around 483BC... the Jewish people have been in exile out of Israel for about 100 years. (God had driven them into exile because of their idolatry and stubbornness. They had been captured by a guy named Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian kingdom had been conquered by King Darius of Persia, and when Darius died Xerxes had taken over, and so he inherited all these Jewish refugees.
- Well, Esther 1, King Xerxes gets stone-cold plastered (I mean 3 sheets to the wind) at a party and orders his beautiful queen, Vashti, to come into the room vs. 11, “with her crown on her head” so that all the drunken royalty guys could “gaze on her beauty.”
 - Scholars are a little divided over exactly what this means... some say it means that he just wanted her to come out unveiled, which in Persia was scandalous in itself... others say this means he wanted her to come

out wearing nothing but her royal crown... with Barry White singing in the background.

- Whatever it was, she just flat said 'no.' Which, good for her. So this embarrasses the king in front of his buddies and he goes back into his bedroom to sulk and one of his wisemen comes to him and says, *"King, bro, this is serious. You gotta do something drastic. Not just for your sake, but for the sake of all men everywhere. You've got to make Vashti an example.* Then comes my favorite verse in all of Esther. The wiseman says this:

1:18 "Before this day is out, the wife of every one of us, your officials throughout the empire, will hear what the queen did and will start talking to their husbands in the same way. There will be no end to the contempt and anger throughout your realm." King, you gotta take one for the team...

(Think about this for a minute... the example you set of men ordering their wives to strut their stuff naked in front of their drunk buddies—not a problem, but her not letting you be head of the house, we got a problem).

- So, Xerxes deposes Vashti and banishes her from the kingdom. So, to find a new queen (a replacement queen) Xerxes holds a contest that is eerily similar to the show, *The Bachelor*. Here's what chapter 2 says,

"2 Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king... (which is not usually how you'd describe the women on the bachelor, but...) then the young woman who pleases you most will be made queen instead of Vashti."

- Well, a Jewish girl named Esther enters the contest. Now, Esther was a little orphan girl and the one thing she had going for was that, she was, in a word, bodacious. Here's what the text says : *"The young woman had a beautiful figure and was*

lovely to look at." **(2:7)** Which is a Hebrew way of saying she had a pretty face and a smokin' hot bod.

- Well, here is how this contest worked. You entered the king's harem, and the king would try you out. You'd appear before the king, I guess you'd do some kind of talent, walk-down-the-runway-in-your swimsuit thingy, and then sleep with the king that night. Then the next night the king would see another finalist and then after a few months he'd decide who he wanted.
- So, it comes time for Esther's turn, and vs. 15 says she wins the contest... hands down. The king loved her best.
- So, this little Jewish refugee orphan girl becomes the Queen of Persia.

Now, I want to make sure you realize what just happened. Because if you grew up in church you probably heard about Esther a lot as some kind of example of virtue... and, in some ways, she will become that. But, let's be honest. She gets off to a pretty rough start: **She enters a sex contest to get married to a pagan King.** Now, scholars debate whether or not Esther had any choice in the matter, but one thing is clear, she went along with it, and in order to win the contest, **she concealed the fact that she was Jewish, which also meant she was silent about her belief in the God of Israel (2:20).**

- This is not how God's people were supposed to do things! This story takes place shortly after the time when Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood up to the King... Daniel... was forbidden to pray and opened his window 3 times a day rather than not praying... then SMA who were told to bow down and they said no... this is not Esther. God's people are to be outspoken. She's going along with a very immoral system and being silent about her belief in God.

Well, let's get back to the story. After she becomes queen, a guy named Haman, who is basically the prime minister of Persia, decides that the Jews are a problem in their country and that, if left unchecked, they're going to take over the kingdom.

So, he comes up with a “final solution to the Jewish problem,” and that is, on a particular day, they should kill them all. So we basically have a prime minister of Iran who wants to kill all the Jews... so, we’ll just call this guy “Ahmadinejad.”

So, Haman presents a plan to Xerxes to exterminate the Jews, and Xerxes, who has a pretty hands-off approach to governing, doesn’t really pay any attention to what Haman is asking and tells him to go ahead... because he’s distracted with planning his next beauty contest or something.

Well, there’s a Jew named Mordecai who works right outside the palace who finds out about this plot... and, he just so happens to be Esther’s uncle and so when he hears about the plot he gets a message to Esther and tells her, “*You’ve got to do something about this! They are going to destroy us all!*”

And Esther sends a message back to him, saying, (4:11) “Uncle Mordecai, what can I do? You remember how Xerxes responds to women disagreeing with him in public? Remember? He had Vashti banished just for refusing to strut her stuff naked in front of all of his drunk buddies... imagine what he’d do if I had the audacity to confront him and tell him that he’s making bad government decisions! He’d have me killed.”

Mordecai’s response to her, in chapter 13, is timeless, and our main text for the morning:

[13] *“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 just such a time as this?”*
(Esther 4:13-14 ESV)

He’s suggesting she go before the king and confront him! Persian law said that if anybody came before the king uninvited, they could be killed. Especially a woman coming in to tell him he’s making a mistake...? This is a deathwish.

*Mordecai’s confidence? God *will* accomplish his purposes. God’s sovereignty is not an excuse for inactivity; on the contrary, God’s sovereignty is what empowers you to do bold, crazy, audacious things for Him. **Example:** me in Indo... God will have people from every tribe and tongue...

“I will go to the king, though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:16)

The short version of the rest of the story (I’d love to get into it) is that God uses Esther’s bravery to save Israel. The king changes his mind; Haman’s plan backfires, and he ends up being hanged on his own gallows, and the Jews are saved. Shortly after this story 2 guys named Nehemiah and Ezra lead these Jews back to Israel, and after a few generations another Jewish girl, a descendant of one of these people that Esther saved, is visited by an angel and told that she is pregnant with the Messiah, the Son of God.

Here’s what I want you to see:

1. Mordecai recognized that God had sovereignly placed Esther in the palace as a part of His plan.

You say, “Wait, wait, wait.” Didn’t Esther get to this palace because she made immoral choices? Well, yes.

But, listen... **the book of Esther doesn’t dwell on how she got there, but the fact that she’s there now.** Somewhere along the way Esther became a godly woman. It doesn’t tell us when or how. Perhaps she

got into the palace and started to realize it wasn't what she thought it was and started to long for something more and so returned to the faith of her dead parents; perhaps it was through this situation where her life is in danger (you know sometimes tragedy makes you reflect on what's important in life and what you're going to live for)... We just don't know. But here, in Esther 4, we see her recognizing God's purposes in her life and putting God's agenda above everything.

Esther's life hinged on her realizing she had been sovereignly placed somewhere with a role to play in God's purposes. ***You are at a place in life by God's sovereign design, and you have a role to play in God's purposes.***

Maybe, like Esther, your past is filled with mistakes... I'm not trying to brush over them, or say they weren't really mistakes... just that when you awaken to God's purposes in your life, He doesn't have you dwell on things in the past you can't change, but focus on how He works in and through you in the present.

Part of God's redemption is your life taking you where you are now and using you from that point on. *Yes, you need to get His forgiveness for what you did in the past, and you need to make restitution where you can.* But you need to do that and move on.

God acts in the present, not in history. He is hope for the future, not condemnation for the past.

God is not only the God of the cross (who forgives your past), He is the God of the resurrection (that remakes your future).

Listen... because part of the mystery of God's redemption is that not only does God forgive your past, He can take your mistakes and even reweave even your mistakes for His good plan.

- One of my favorite little facts about my wife... Veronica's decision to go to UVA... at UVA got involved in a ministry in which she meets me... now a blessing to me, this church, living out God's

plan, all going back to a decision that was made for at least the wrong reasons...

- Told that story and my wife leans over and says marrying me was the punishment for that sin
- The mystery of God's grace is that He takes even our mistakes and reweaves them for blessing and His plan.
- Some of you have broken marriages, drugs in your past. Terrible mistakes. God will take even those things use them for His plan. Some of you can minister to people in those same situations precisely because you went through them.
- I'm thinking here of Amber Lehman in our church who was formerly a prostitute, found Christ, and now directs PSS in Wake Forest and can speak to these girls in a way they understand.
- Do you have a child out of wedlock? Are you divorced? You are like Esther... Get forgiveness for what you did in the past and get on with what God has for you in the future.

Maybe your past includes a lot of pain in it caused by others... I don't want to brush over your pain or imply that it was no big deal. What I want you to do is that God is able to take even your pain and use it for His plan.

- Paul talks about his suffering (in 2 Cor 1:4) that we "are now able to comfort others with the comfort whether we have been comforted." Paul is saying, "God's whole point in my suffering was letting me experience a part of Him, His comfort, so that I could share that with you in your pain."
- Listen, I want to say something that is not intended to be insensitive... I want to set you free, OK? **Some of you really need to get out of the victim mentality...** because it is killing your present. "But I was a victim!" Victim implies powerless. But you are not powerless; You have a redeeming God who sovereignly can recreate all things for your good and His plan, and there is nothing more powerful than that.

Point is: Don't obsess over what you can't change. God has a sovereign plan in having you here at this moment...Get on with it!

- Interesting factoid: “God” not mentioned in Esther... reason: in a lot of Esther it seems like God is absent. But you, the reader, see that even when God seems absent, He has been weaving a plan. It is the same in your life!

2. Esther’s influence was in the palace, not in the temple

- She’s not in the ministry.
- Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as the City*: 3 main characters that were used by God in the return from exile.
 - You’ve got a guy named Ezra, who was a teacher of the law—he taught the people God’s words and God’s ways;
 - Nehemiah (urban developer and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem)
 - Esther (queen who worked in the secular courts for justice)
 - God used all 3 kinds of people to bring about the restoration of his people.
- The heart of this church is not having you all quit your jobs and go into ministry, or even making you think that your ministry happens here by being a greeter... greeters are important... it is to help you discover how to leverage your position in the Kingdom of God.
- God has placed some of you ‘in the palace.’ Or, given you the capacity to get to the palace. That’s good. We need Christians in places of influence.
- Many of our university students, this is what God is preparing you for. You have a job at one of the top universities. God uses Christians in business, government, medicine and art.
- We need Christians upstream, not mimicking culture
 - CSI
 - Stick figures bowing down to the cross

3. Esther leveraged her position in the palace for God’s kingdom, not for self-promotion

- Esther faced the most fundamental decision of her life... am I going to use this position to protect myself, or am I going to leverage myself and my position for the Kingdom of God even if it costs me everything?
- Question:
 - What do you want from being in the palace? Is it for you? Or for the Kingdom of God?
 - Or, those of you already in a job, how are you using your position?
- This is the most fundamental question of discipleship. Whose kingdom are you living for?
 - Discipleship question (?)
- Esther’s objection to Mordecai (vs. 11): “If I risk the palace, I might lose everything.” Mordecai’s response (vs. 13) was: “Yes, Esther, that’s true. But if you don’t risk the palace, you will lose everything. You’re already dead.”
- Sounds like Jesus’ words: He who loves his life will lose it...
- You say, “I want to live for God’s kingdom?” What does that look like for me? I don’t know of any plots to kill all the Jews that I can stop.”

4 ways (a, b, c, d)

How do I leverage my place in “the palace” for God’s kingdom?

Well, start with the obvious...

- a. **You can share Christ with people in your “palace.”** In a sense, the palace each of you live in is where you live and work. **No one who can live out or explain the Gospel to them like you can...** because you can be up close to them. People listen most to those people who are close to them and who are like them.
 - **Jason tells our high school students...** you’re the only spirit-filled person in your high school who can share Christ.
 - You are a **nuclear physics major...**

- Some of you are afraid to open your mouth and say anything because of what others may think or because it might negatively affect your job. Like Esther, take some risks!
- 37 of 40 miracles.

b. You can leverage your skill to bring salvation to places where God is not known

- Vision... not a bunch of rich people... paying a bunch of seminary students to go do missions. We want you to do it.
- The Gospel has always forward on the wings of business. Paul wanted to be the 1st one to take the Gospel to Rome... but when he got there in Acts 28, he was met by Christians! Soldiers and businessmen.
- You can get a comfortable position here, you could use your talent to get a job in someplace we are planting a church
 - **e.g. Alex in Denver.**
 - **E.g. Curt in SE Asia**
- I don't mean to imply you all start non-profits. Profit making companies are good for everyone... when you make profit you enrich everyone... Got a friend whose dream is to talk *Chick-fil-a* into opening little restaurants in unreached people groups and hire people to work there who will also carry the Gospel with them.

c. **You can give money away.** Some of you need to live on much, much less. You can make tons of money, but you can give it away. Here's a question: Your lifestyle, does it show that this life is for you, or for others? Take up your cross? Paul said in 2 Corinthians that God increases our seed for sowing... not to increase standard of living, but standard of giving.

d. **You can volunteer in our community** (tons of projects... maybe a skill you can yield)

4. Esther became great by giving up the palace

- 13 of 14 times she is called queen is after the situation in chapter 4. In other words, it was this moment in Esther's life that made her truly a queen.
- Writer is showing you... she became a great person not by trying to become a great person, but by yielding her talents and position for others
- Greatness in God's Kingdom is never found by trying to become great, but by offering your life for others...
- You might never have a Bible book named after you... but you will have an eternal reward in the form of people in heaven whose lives were saved because you allowed yourself to be used by God.
- **Allen...**
- **(Me: man of valor)**

Here's my point... like Esther, you are at a place sovereignly appointed by God and lives are at stake. You have to act. Who knows but that you did not come into the kingdom for just such a time as this?

That includes ministry in professions and places here, but there are 6500 what we call UPG's in the world... and some of you have the skill to get to them. Do you know they are perishing just like the Jews in Esther's story were going to perish? And don't you realize you can do something about it? Isn't it time you did so?

So, over the next 4 weeks, I want to help move you along in that process

- Pray (70 of 200 small groups), invest (300K), group, go (250 people on short term trips; 70 overseas; 6500 hours).
- Special forum on Oct 26:

- You might be thinking you might be called to overseas work
- Wondering how your skill might be used for the kingdom?
- How to be involved in one of our church plants
- College students... thinking about being involved in missions... 2 years? Oct 26.

Now, I don't want to end this message leading you astray, so you leave saying, "I want to be like Esther." A lot of times we read these stories as if they are examples... but how do you do that? How do you develop the ability to give up your life for others?

5. Esther is not an example, she's a signpost

We see these characters as examples...

(1) In many ways she is not.

(2) Seeing her as an example might inspire you, but it can't empower you to give up your life. (If all you do is look at these Bible characters as examples, they will discourage you because you never measure up.)

Esther is there to point you to Jesus

- Jesus was the real Esther... Jesus lived in the ultimate palace and had the ultimate glory. But He left it, turned His back on it so that He could save you.
- Unlike Esther, nobody had to pressure him to do it.
- Philippians 2 says he emptied himself and identified with us by taking on the form of our servant, and then suffered and died in our place and then took our condemnation.
- He didn't simply do this at the risk of his life, like Esther, but at the cost of it.
- And now He stands not before the throne of Xerxes but the throne of the universe and uses the good favor He has obtained to bless us and protect us.

- ***And because He did that, we are forgiven for all the ways we don't measure up to these standards.***
- And when you see that... that Jesus gave up His life to embrace and accept you when you didn't measure up, by looking into that you'll develop the ability to give up your life for others.
- We have a deep need to turn Bible characters into heroes because we still suppose the point of the Bible is to make us act better. It is not. It is to point us to Jesus who can change our lives. None of the Bible characters are there to point you to themselves... they are all there to point you to Jesus.

Knowing Him brings the change.

Conclusion: Don't get cart before the horse... living for Jesus comes after being rescued by Jesus

Bullpen:

Better leverage position they have; get themselves in better positions for leverage. Angle yourself to get in better palaces

Now, she'd made a lot of mistakes in getting into that role... but that was not as important as the fact that she was there now.

When the time comes, she doesn't brood over a bunch of the things in the past that she cannot change. She lives in the present and figures out how she can leverage the position she has for the purposes of God.

What I want you to become aware of is that no less than Esther, God has sovereignty appointed the events of your life and he has a purpose he intends to use you for. And, just like with Esther, it is a plan that involves the life and death and salvation of others.

I want you to meditate on this liberating statement for a minute: All of your life... your mistakes, the injustices of others that have been inflicted upon you... over all of that God has been sovereign and where you are now, God has a plan to use you for His good. Think about this: You, right now, are exactly where God has appointed you to be. You have come into the Kingdom for just such a time as this.

That doesn't excuse the wrongs that have gone in your past, whether done by you to yourself or by others...

For example, some of you have been abused and mistreated by others... What I'm about to say does not excuse what they did to you. I'm not trying to say "Don't worry about that... what they did wasn't that bad." No, it was wrong and God hated what they did and wept

with you while they were doing it to you. But that doesn't mean God does not intend to use that in your life for His good.

God has a way of taking even the bad things in our lives and using them for His plan. Paul talks about his suffering (in 1 Thess) that we "are now able to comfort others with the comfort whether we have been comforted." Paul is saying, "God's whole point in my suffering was letting me experience a part of Him, His comfort, so that I could share that with you in your pain." Listen... some of you have gone through disease, relational abuse, failure... it was terrible... and I'm not saying God was doing it to you... God hated it... but that doesn't mean God can't use it. God can use you to help others in the same position by comforting them with the comfort you known in Him.

Say this gently... Some of you really need to get out of the victim mentality... it is killing you. Victim implies powerlessness. You are not powerless; God sovereignly works all things for your good and His plan.

Or, maybe your life, like Esther's has been full of mistakes. I'm not trying to excuse those mistakes. I'm trying to say that the past is past. Get forgiveness for those things and realize that part of God's redemption is not just forgiving you for the past but redeeming your life in the present... transforming your mistakes into the blessing of others. One of the mysteries of God's grace... God takes even our mistakes and reweaves them for blessing and His plan.

- Y'all think my wife is a blessing to this church? Yes. She's a blessing to me... couldn't imagine a better Pastor's wife. Because of her faithful love and sacrifice... she enables me to do what I do for you each Sunday.
- Little known fact... Veronica's decision to go to UVA... all going back to a decision that was made for at least the wrong reasons...

- Currently, 1.48 billion people have NO access to the Gospel. 3.06 billion have little (or nearly no) access to the Gospel.
- Africa: 3000 animistic tribes
- China: 1 billion people who don't know Jesus...
- Indonesia: 50,000 villages with no Gospel witness
- 100,000 children who die each week of starvation or preventable hunger related diseases
- Not all bad news:
 - In 1970, there were over 7000 "unreached" people groups (groups with no access to the Gospel) that numbered over 1 million in population. Due to a massive missions movement in the US and elsewhere, that number is now down to 400!
 - In 1997, church planters in the IMB were training only 30,000 national believers in church leadership/church planting. Today that number is over 250,000! The Great Commission is not the white man's burden. It is the property of believers in every nation, and we are recognizing that!

When Paul died, there was 12 upg's for every 1 church; now, there is 1 upg for every 680 churches

- But I'll lose my job... I'll lose my career... quit playing it safe
- Some of you need to ask... Why do you want to get into the palace? Self-promotion or God promotion?
- *The palace is a place from which you can save life by extending the Kingdom.*

- I realize that in our church you are at all different stages... high schoolers and college students wondering what to do with their lives;
- middle-aged adults who are in the middle of their careers and wanting to know how to have a life of significance and even retirees thinking about how to make this part of their lives count. Sometimes people say to me, "Wow, I wish I'd heard and known some of this stuff when I was younger... I might have made different choices about my career... but I want to know what to do now. How do I take the rest of my life and leverage it for God's Kingdom?" Or, "I'm in a secular profession... this is what I'm good at. So, what's my role in the Kingdom? Am I a 2nd class Christian because I'm not in the ministry?" In Christian circles there are often "classes" (regular people; pastors; then on top you have missionaries... they are 1st class, Navy Seals). I'm going to show you that's all wrong.

A couple of very important things here I notice about Mordecai's response: (1) Mordecai's confidence in the sovereignty of God to accomplish His purpose... Can I tell you where real confidence to do bold things for God comes from? From knowing that God has a plan He will accomplish... I used to think about this working with Muslims... God has promised!

2nd thing I notice is Mordecai's recognition that Esther's placement in the palace as Queen was a sovereign appointment by God

and no. It was Mordecai's idea to get her into the palace, and the book presents that as a good thing, but the way she did it was clearly not right, because it was in clear violation of God's laws.

1. God has exercised a certain sovereignty in getting you where you are, and the point now is not how you got here, but what you do now.

- Esther's life hinged on her realizing she had been sovereignly placed somewhere with a role to play in God's purposes. She was in a position that meant life and death for others. That's what I want you to do. Realize that you have been sovereignly placed somewhere, and leverage your position for the Kingdom.
 - **Eastway? Golden Leaf Award. Me at MLK. Always knew you Christians...**
 - **Allen?**

My point: You are put in your position just like Esther where you can save lives for the Kingdom of God. Your palace is whatever place of influence you can use for God's kingdom. What does that look like?