

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

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People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).

Esther Chapter Four

"The Mourning Man March"

Introduction

Short-term missions have always been an important emphasis in our fellowship. We've sent individuals or teams to:

1. China – to smuggle Bibles for the underground Church.
2. To Japan – to hold pastor's conferences.
3. To the Philippines – to teach pastor's the inductive Bible study method; to hold evangelistic meetings; and to participate in medical and dental clinics.
4. To Honduras – to participate in medical and dental clinics.
5. To Belize – to participate in building projects.
6. To various places in Baja California – to work in orphanages and among disadvantaged children.
7. To Peru – to support Churches in Lima and Pucallpa in a variety of ways.
8. To Bay St. Louis, Mississippi – to feed Hurricane Katrina victims and work on rebuilding their lives, both physically and spiritually.

As much as these trips help the people we visit, perhaps the main effect of them is on us. We're forced to abandon our own comfort zone and get involved. Our involvement is never without risk; but the reward always outweighs the risk as we simply follow God's leading.

If ever someone was challenged to abandon her own comfort zone and get involved, it was Queen Esther! Right outside of the gates of her palace there was a call to get involved. It was not

without risk; but the reward would greatly outweigh the risk as she simply followed God's leading.

Esther did not have to travel far on her short-term mission to the inner court of the king. Her task was to intercede on behalf of the Jews. The call to intercede involved a cost. It always does.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 There Is A Call For You To Intercede, and #2 There Is A Cost When You Intercede.

#1 There Is A Call For You To Intercede (v1-9)

Mordecai was Esther's uncle. He had encouraged his niece to compete in a national contest to choose the next queen of Persia. Esther won the contest and had been living in luxury as queen to King Ahasuerus. In all of this, Mordecai and Esther hid the fact they were Jews.

King Ahasuerus promoted as his second-in-command an evil individual named Haman. Haman commanded that everyone bow down before him. Mordecai refused on religious principles and was outed as a Jew. Haman decided to retaliate by not only killing Mordecai, but by exterminating all the Jews living anywhere in the provinces of Persia. He had Ahasuerus issue a decree to that effect.

That decree caused widespread mourning among the Jews:

Esther 4:1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

Esther 4:2 He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

Mordecai was a man in mourning. He marched through the city until arriving just outside the palace. Hence it was *The Mourning Man March!*

I almost wish we would adopt the practice of tearing our **clothes** and putting on **sackcloth and ashes**. It would completely eliminate our sometimes empty greeting that asks, "How are you doing?"

There was a palace dress code. You could not get in to the palace wearing **sackcloth**. What I want us to begin to see is just how insulated was Esther as queen. She lived in the very lap of luxury – so much so that she had no idea what was happening outside her very comfortable zone.

Esther 4:3 And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Sackcloth refers to garments made of rough cloth, usually from camel's hair or goat's hair. **Ashes** were ashes, from the household cook stove (I suppose). This wasn't just wearing a pin or a ribbon. You put on a whole outfit of mourning, then threw ashes over your head.

I think there probably was a store where you could get a sackcloth and ashes kit. You'd keep it on hand for times when extreme mourning was called for.

Esther 4:4 So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*.

Esther had no clue what was occurring just outside her walls. It goes without saying that her husband didn't confide in her.

Another thing to realize about Esther's life: **She could not leave the palace**. As queen, she was confined within its walls. She was a prisoner of luxury. The Holy Spirit is establishing the emptiness and shallowness of living comfortably.

Esther was hoping Mordecai would change clothes so he could come in to the palace. He refused. His mourning was too deep, too intense, for him to abandon it.

How sad that Esther was so insulated she could not even approach her uncle – who had been like a father to her after her own parents were killed. (This is the Father's Day portion of our message!).

Esther 4:5 Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had

appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was.

Esther 4:6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate.

Esther 4:7 And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

Esther 4:8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people.

Esther 4:9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Mordecai called upon Esther to intercede on behalf of the Jews.

When we think of interceding, or intercession, we think of a type of praying. Here we see that intercession is prayer *plus* involvement of some kind.

Think of Jesus. Scripture describes Him as ever living to intercede on our behalf. He's in Heaven, talking to God about you right now! But before He could ever live to intercede for you, He had to leave Heaven and come to earth as a man. He had to live and work among us. He had to die on the Cross for us; then rise again on the third day. He had to get involved.

When you pray for someone, you'd better be ready to get involved with them as well. **You** are often the answer, or part of the answer, to your own prayers for them!

True, when you pray for someone, God releases resources into their lives. He gives them grace and mercy sufficient for their need. But you also are a resource for them; and you have resources to give them.

The world is abounding with Mordecai's. There are needs upon needs. Most of us, here in the United States, are Esther's. We're pretty comfortable; we're pretty insulated. Are we willing to go before our King and intercede on behalf of those who have need? Are we willing to get involved?

Of course we are! How could we live in luxury, ignoring the needs outside our walls, if Jesus is really our passion and purpose for living?

Esther was called upon to intercede. She would learn next that there was a cost.

#2 There Is A Cost When You Intercede (v10-17)

We've already touched upon the fact that there is a cost. We've seen it in Jesus:

1. It cost our Lord to leave Heaven for earth.
2. It cost Him to live and work among us.
3. It cost Him His life, on the Cross, to become our intercessor.

Esther must count the cost.

Esther 4:10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai:

Esther 4:11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days."

Esther 4:12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

King Ahasuerus was obsessive about his privacy. He didn't want folks invading his personal space. Come to him without being called and you could be executed – unless he pointed his scepter your direction.

Are you sad for Esther? You should be. Not only was she a palace prisoner; but she had fallen out of favor with her husband. He'd been spending the last month of nights with girls from his harem. Esther was a fixture, an object, an artifact.

Esther was very beautiful physically, and had used her beauty to become queen. She had acted as if she were no more than something physical, something sensual; an object. Now she was

treated that way. If you want to put your efforts and emphasis on the physical, you will be treated like an object yourself.

Esther 4:13 And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews.

Did you catch the significance of what Mordecai just said? Remember that this conversation is being conducted through Hathatch and is probably being overheard by some of Esther’s other eunuchs and maidservants.

Mordecai just outed Esther as a Jew! It would have been a shock to her servants.

We occasionally need shock-treatment. Call it shock-treatment for God’s elect... Or “elect shock treatment.” We need to hear something, or see something, that causes us to say to ourselves, “*Hey! I’m a Christian! I need to act; I need to get involved.*”

Those “somethings” ought to be spiritual in nature. Here’s what I mean: We don’t allow people to come here and speak to you roughly about what losers you are for not being more involved in their cause or mission. We do talk to you about needs and opportunities. We want to appeal to you to get involved because the love of Jesus is poured-out upon you; not because you’ve been beat over the head with guilt.

The spiritual purpose of Esther’s position in the palace is beginning to appear:

Esther 4:14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

Esther should *never* have willingly entered the beauty contest to become a pagan queen who denied her religious heritage and worshipped idols. Still, **God could use her!**

We should never think we can sin, then simply receive the grace of God. But we do sin; and, when we do sin, God's grace is abundantly available to us.

God didn't put Esther in the palace as queen. Mordecai realized as much when he said, **relief and deliverance [could] arise... from another place**. But, since she was there, this was the moment for her to repent and get involved.

All things work together for those who love God and are the called according to His purpose. You might have made some bad decisions; you might be where you are because of disobedience to God. Nevertheless, wherever you are today – God can use you in a powerful way.

Esther 4:15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai:

Esther 4:16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

Esther 4:17 So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.

Esther gets up to full speed faster than that new Bugatti automobile! She goes from being a closet-Jew to calling for a **fast** - not just for herself, but for all the Jews and her own servants.

Listen: When you decide to repent and return to walking with God, just go for it! Don't be weighed down by the things which have gone before. Get up to spiritual speed in a heartbeat.

Esther counted the cost and was willing to pay it. She would lose her life if it came to it. But she would lose it serving God – and, thus, she had found her life.

The cost of discipleship is nothing less than your life. But in losing your life, you find it. The risk is always cancelled-out by the reward.

Something else to consider: Esther **was going to lose her life anyway!** She had been outed as a Jew, and would therefore be killed when the day of slaughter came.

Living in comfort is always a mirage. Live that way, surrounded by or at least pursuing the material world, and you will lose your life anyway, but have nothing to show for it in the end. **For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?** (Matthew 16:26).

Applying God's Word...

If you are a Christian, I hope you see how dangerous it is to intercede for someone or something. God may call you to do something about it! Like Esther, the needs are right outside your comfort zone – just waiting for you to discover them.

Maybe you've been backslidden; or are involved in sin, or in some way are disobeying God. Get back up to speed. Repent and avail yourself of the grace and mercy that are found in abundance at the throne of God.

Maybe you are not yet saved; not yet a Christian. No matter how comfortable you might be or become, your life will be empty without God. The more you pursue the things of the world, the more you will become like them; the less truly human you will be.

You were made to know God and to share a relationship with Him. Don't settle for anything less.