

MAKING A DENT IN YOUR WORLD, ESTHER 4

◆**Intro:** Sometimes people think that God is only interested in churches. Sometimes people think that churches should only talk about God. But what people sometimes don't realize is that God is interested in everything and everyone, all the time. God is interested in biology. Well, he is the creator. God is interested in politics. The Bible says that there is no government that is not instituted, or allowed to exist apart from God. God is even interested sports, after all, his favorite part of creation are the ones who play sports: people!

◆On his way to work one day, Chicago insurance broker Bob Muzikowski saw a derelict ball field full of trash in a gang-infested neighborhood. The kids there could use a real Little League to play in, he thought. He teamed up with a friend to create the Near North Little League. In "pretty wild" early practice sessions, coaches dealt with 250 boys long on enthusiasm but short on fundamentals. Each game began with a prayer. Cursing was strictly forbidden. "While I had no illusions that I'd change the world, I had no doubt that God wanted me to play baseball with these kids," said Muzikowski, converted not long before. "My faith had taught me that being a Christian means truly believing what Jesus said about loving my neighbor." The next year, 400 kids joined the league. Today 900 fatherless kids in 100 Little League teams are learning self-respect and community values. Reporters wonder why a wealthy businessman lives among the poor, coaching other people's kids. Muzikowski answers, "Jesus didn't say, 'When you've paid someone to do it unto the least of these.' What he said was, 'when you have done it.'"

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◆Here you have a fellow helping struggling kids by playing baseball with them. He's doing it because God urged him to.

◆**1. I was made to be an influence for good and God.**

◆Did you know that God has reasons for making you? Some folks think they are on the earth as an accident, not really for any reason at all. The Bible says

◆*“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10, NIV.*

◆That means that at least part of why you are alive is to influence the world for good and God. To, like God, create goodness, god-ness in the world. You are not here just to take up space, to eat up plants, and to use up time. No. Every person's life is about more than them. It is about the goodness of the Kingdom of the God. Listen to God speaking through Isaiah the prophet...

◆*““You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no saviour. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed--I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No-one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”” Isaiah 43:10-13, NIV.*

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◆What does a witness do? He says it twice. Witnesses witness to the truth. They speak up.

◆Our example today is a young girl who lived about 500 years BC, so over 2500 years ago. Her name was Hadassah. Her Persian name was Esther. She was an orphan. Her parents were dead. She was a foreigner because a generation before her, her whole country was attacked and most of her people were hauled off to Babylon as prisoners. She was raised by her cousin, Mordecai, who served as a minor government official in Persia, something like being a door guard at the White House. Xerxes, the king, had a party (a long one, 6 months!) and toward the end he decided to show all his friends how pretty his wife, the queen was. But she wouldn't come and play along so he fired her and began holding a national beauty pageant for a new Miss Persia. Low and behold, Esther, the foreign orphan, made the finals! As the account goes, she was taken to the palace, pampered with perfume and bathes, and swims in the pool, and makeup, and hairdressers, and fancy foods and you name it... for a whole year, along with others. And when the king finally picked from the most beautiful ladies, Esther, a nobody, won and became queen!

◆But the story is complicated. While all this is happening, the Vice-president of Persian, Haman, happens to hate Mordecai, the new queen's adoptive parent and has plotted to kill him and all his people, the Jews (people from the land of Judah). Guess what? That's right. Esther was a Jew!

◆**A.** So one of the first things we see in Esther's story is that the god-following life is no life in a bubble. To influence the world for good and God

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is hard and requires risk! What was Esther's risk? Well, for one the previous queen, Vashti, had also been very beautiful. But she ticked the king off by not jumping when he barked, for not coming when he called her. Now Esther is contemplating coming when she isn't called; also a risk. It was easy-come-easy-go with this beauty-queen loving king. Read verse eleven!

◆ *““The whole world knows that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him in more than a month.”” Esther 4:11, NLT.*

◆ Persian law wasn't like American law. If anyone got too close to the King without a personal invitation, they shot first. Asked questions later! In fact, only the immediate and spontaneous gesture of the king could stop the predetermined death sentence! It wasn't like Mom going into the study to tell Dad to pick up his shoes and put them away. So Esther was actually risking her life.

◆ There's a parallel for us in this too. It's no simple thing to stand up and try to influence the world for God and good. When others are choosing bad, they don't want to hear you tell them that. When all the other guys are pocketing candy bars without paying they don't think highly of the one who says "Hey guys, this isn't right." It makes them feel guilty. So they call you a sissy, or a nark and leave you out of things. It's easier to go along with what everyone else does. If you stand up and say that God's design for marriage is a beautiful, life-long commitment between one man and a woman, after the

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Supreme Court has decided otherwise –people will hate you, and call you a bigot and a discriminator. In Esther’s world the Supreme Court had just decided it was against the law to be a Jew! This is happening right now in Iran, Afghanistan, and other Middle East places where it's illegal to be Christian! What should we do? Shall we just keep to ourselves, keep driving the kids to soccer practice and buying MacDonalds, and watching our favorite Netflix show? There’s a risk in taking God’s side and trying to influence the world.

◆ You have to read the news and find the facts. You have to spend time writing emails to you governor and your congressman, or calling their Washington office. You have to speak up and say things like, “I don’t think my tax dollars should be giving to Planned Parenthood who encourages abortions and sells the baby parts to research labs (as we’ve seen in the news for the last several months.) It costs to try and change your world instead of merely watching the news. But like Mordecai reminded Esther, that’s why we’re here!

◆ *“Mordecai sent back this reply to Esther: “Don’t think for a moment that you will escape there in the palace when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. What’s more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?””*

Esther 4:13, 14, NLT.

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◆**B.** Some folks think people follow God because they want the easy life. “Hey God loves you and you go to heaven when you die.” Isn’t that nice and simple? Not really. Jesus also said...

◆In this world you will have trouble... (Jn16:33)

◆““Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Be as wary as snakes and harmless as doves. But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and beaten in the synagogues. And you must stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. This will be your opportunity to tell them about me--yes, to witness to the world.” Matthew 10:16-18, NLT.

◆So lets not have any of this notion that following Jesus and trying to influence the world for God is for weaklings and sissies. God asks you to be strong. To be courageous. To get in the way of the bad guy. God asks you to stand up for something that’s risky but right, instead of sitting back in something that’s safe but sinful. That’s what his church is all about; putting people on adventure with God!

◆What are you standing up for in this world? What are you stepping up to in your life? Where are you influencing people for good and God? I’m sure you’ve heard the well repeated exchange between Steve Jobs and John Scully who was CEO for Pepsi when Steve was trying to hire him to work for Apple. "Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life, or do you want to come with me and change the world?" It’s the kind of question Queen Esther had to answer. Its the kind of question God asks you and me too.

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◆That brings me to one more lesson from Esther about influencing the world.

◆**2. God invites me to live with him among those who do not yet live with him.**

◆A lot of people think that if you follow God, you need to keep away from everyone else who doesn't. Many Christians have no non-Christian friends within 2 years of becoming believers! Many believers think they shouldn't buy goods from unbelievers, or trade with companies that belong to pagan people. Many get their car fixed by Christians. Buy their shoes from fellow church-goers. Golf with people from their church. -Now hang on! None of this is bad. There's nothing inherently wrong about any of it. But keep in mind that God's pattern is to call us out upon the water, like Peter on the Sea of Galilee. God's methodology is to send his people into the corners of the world. Think of Abraham and his patriarchal promise in Genesis 12

◆*"I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."* Genesis 12:2, 3, NLT.

◆Esther's story is a familiar pattern of God's activity in ancient history: sending his people to he nations. Note these parallels:

◆1) Joseph was the second in command ruler of Egypt, a foreign government where he was under assignment from God. He himself said that he ended up there because "God meant it for good: the saving of many lives." Esther is in the same situation.

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◆2) Esther is like Daniel, also carted off to a foreign land (Babylon), became a high official in the government of an ungodly nation under two different administrations (Babylon and Persia) showing them that his God actually answers prayers

◆3) Daniels friends (Rack, Shack, and Benny) were fingered for not “bowing down” to the Kings idol, or religion just as Mordecai is targeted by Haman for not bowing down to him.

◆What do we conclude? God does NOT want me to keep to myself or to keep him and his ways to myself. If I’m a follower of God, everywhere I go I’m on assignment. I’m out to influence people who don’t want me to influence them. I want to affect the people at my business. I want to influence the mechanic who fixes my car. I want to affect my ball team. [By the way, what would happen if all the church softball teams in town joined and played in other leagues (non-church) in town, interacting with people who don’t give a hoot about God and talking about their lives and the news and influencing them? Can you imagine the impact?.]

◆ Paul calls Christians *“children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life-”* *Philippians 2:15, 16, NIV.*

◆**Conclusion:** I don’t know where you are in life right now but I know God is here. You might be in a job that feels completely unfulfilling. I know what that’s like. I had my share of those jobs growing up. But listen, the Bible says God determines the exact times and places where we live (Acts17:26). If there’s anything that Esther’s story tells us, its that God is remarkably good at orchestrating the details of life so that we can

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cooperate with his larger plan. Note this interesting statement in our text.

And

◆“If you keep quiet at a time like this, *deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place*, but you and your relatives will die.”

Esther 4:14, NLT.

◆Did you know that Esther is one of only 2 books in the Bible that never actually mention God? But God is at work, and present nonetheless. What does Mordecai say? “Deliverance for the Jews will arise...” This is the age old promise of God to his chosen people! Mordecai and Esther may be living out their time on this earth in a foreign capital, under pagan law, but Mordecai knows very well God is there too, acting, protecting, orchestrating even foreign kings and inviting his people in on it. Second, Esther decides to fast for 3 days. Every Jew knows why you fast; to pray to God! Maybe the author doesn’t write the word “God” in the story to make him conspicuous by his absence? Esther’s story that doesn’t mention God by name reminds us that God is in charge everywhere you go even when you don’t see him, and even where people don’t believe in him. His Kingdom is on the move, and he invites you in on it.

◆So it’s no accident that Esther is in the palace, and it’s no accident that you are in Lafayette or whatever town you live in. And it’s no accident that you work where you do, even if you don’t hope to stay there. And it’s no accident you’re in the family you’re in. All along the way God is inviting you to cooperate with bringing his goodness and kingdom into the world. Maybe there’s a “such a time as this” where you work. Maybe there’s one person who needs to see what a God can do where you live. Maybe

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there's an empty ball lot that God wants you to transform. God's in that kind of business.