

## Put Faith in Action

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Esther chapter 4.

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are just beginning a series through the book of Esther I've titled: Silent Providence, Certain Deliverance.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Scottish runner Eric Liddell, the winner of the Olympic Gold Medal and the inspiration of the film *Chariots of Fire* was a missionary to China whose lived a life of faith. During World War II the part of China he served in was overrun by the Imperial Japanese army. Westerners like him were sent to an internment camp in Shandong Province. In 2 and a half acres- or the size of a large city block, 2000 people were crammed together. Each person's personal space was only 9 feet long by 54 inches wide and likely dirty and infested with bugs. Basically room for a bed and three feet at the end of it.

Life was brutal. And human nature came out. The prisoners fought each other over everything. Even the seemingly religious people would use self-preservation as an excuse for stealing or refusing to help others. They claimed to have faith but they acted like God wouldn't provide or protect them. But Liddell was the exception. He spent his time caring for the people around him. His faith worked itself out in actions. His life, even in those horrible conditions was overflowing with sacrificial love toward others, a sense of humor, a love of life, and inward peace. His faith affirmed that God was still in control and still good- even though it was heavily tested. His faith motivated actions especially toward the teenagers who he poured what energy he had into encouraging them. He cooked for them. He supervised recreation for them so that they could still experience the joys of being made in God's image. He lived by faith. He didn't despair and wait to die. He didn't keep his religious views in one compartment of life and his actions in another. Instead, Liddell put faith into action.

[FCF] How do you act when is your faith tested? When you encounter doubts do you just ignore them? When you are scared do you retreat and do nothing? How

easy is it for outsiders to spot your faith from your actions? What would you do if you were in a depressing situation with apparently no hope of things getting better- how would faith in God and Christ motivate you to act? Esther 4 is a chance for us to learn how to

### **[Proposition] Put Faith in Action**

If we really believe, we will act in ways consistent with our faith. We haven't really seen much faith from Esther and Mordecai, but chapter 4 becomes a turning point in the book where we see both of these Jews beginning to put faith into action. We'll look at three things today that will help us learn to put faith into action. We'll look at the situation for faith, we'll listen to the conversation that builds faith, and we'll look at the application of faith.

First let's be reminded of

### **[Main Point 1] The Situation for Faith**

Remember from last week that Jews throughout the Persian empire have learned that they are to all be killed simply for being Jews. They have been given an eleven months to live. That's the broad situation for faith but let's look at the specifics for Mordecai and Esther by seeing vv. 1-3

*When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.*

King Xerxes' court is a place of comfort and ease. It's an escape. Food, wine, women, parties, entertainment. Killjoys or Debbie Downers are not welcome. And that's Mordecai and that's the Jews wearing dirty sackcloth and wailing in misery. So Mordecai is not allowed to enter into the king's presence. And he's not hiding it. The situation is a death sentence for the Jews. They respond the way many of the forefathers in their faith responded- they wept and lamented their dire situation. They denied themselves comfort by wearing rough sackcloth and placed ashes across their skin. They denied themselves food- they were fasting. The

king's court has been about feasting. But the situation for God's people is one where they are fasting. They are recognizing that they have no hope unless God intervenes. From our perspective, this means that Jesus will never be born. This is the desperate situation for faith.

[Application] We want it easy, but God wants us to trust Him. Oftentimes the best situation for faith, then, is when things are hard. When we're sick, unemployed, rejected, poor, and struggling- those are often the best situations for faith. When we're uncomfortable. When we have nowhere to go but to God. To see if He will deliver us, protect us, keep us alive.

We're look at putting faith into action. We've seen the situation for faith, now let's look at

### **[Main Point 2] The Conversation that builds Faith**

One of the main purposes of conversation between two believers is to help build up the faith of one another. Is that a major part of your conversation after church? Outside home group? I know I could grow in this. But let's look at the back and forth conversation between Mordecai and Esther that builds faith.

[Conversation Part 1] Esther's question

Read vv. 4-6 with me

*When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and order him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate,*

Esther is out of the loop. She is separated from the king. And she's separated from the Jews. She doesn't know what's happening. So when she hears that Mordecai is acting like a loud, miserable, homeless person, she asks a question: What's going on? Why are you acting like this? Why do you refuse to wear ice clothes? What's causing all of this?

Many of us would be built up in the faith much quicker if we learned to ask more questions of those around us. To ask why more mature believers do the things

they do. Why they are feeling the way they feel. Esther's question is part 1 of the conversation that builds faith. Now we get to

[Conversation Part 2] Mordecai's answer

Read vv. 7-9 with me

*...and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.*

Mordecai's answer is to tell Esther that Haman has hired the whole Persian empire as paid hitmen to take out the Jews. Mordecai is acting the way he is for a reason. The answer to Esther's question is that he's trying to get her attention. And Mordecai wants to command her to go talk to the king and get him to intervene and stop their coming deaths. She must do act. Hathach is the messenger and mediator between Mordecai and Esther, but Mordecai's answer is that he wants Esther to be the messenger and mediator between the Jews and the king.

[Application] Faith is a product of humility. Humble people aren't afraid to ask for help. Faith is built when we recognize that there are things we're incapable of doing, so we look to others and ultimately God to help us. Do you ask others to help you in your faith? Are you humble enough to appear powerless before others? Mordecai's answer is showing that he's growing and building his faith.

But Hathach still has messages to deliver in the conversation that builds faith. Part 1 was Esther's question. Part 2 was Mordecai's answer. Now

[Conversation Part 3] Esther's Excuse

Many of us live our lives like by making excuses. Mordecai's answer is calling Esther to act. But she comes up with an excuse. We read it in vv. 10-12

*Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there*

is but one law- to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

*And they told Mordecai what Esther had said.*

Esther is the queen but she has a big excuse. It's been a few years since she was raised up the role of queen. It seems that she's fallen out of favor a bit. The king has a whole harem of women he can bed. He hasn't called Esther to be with him for a month. The first part of Esther's excuse is that she just doesn't hang out with the king much anymore. But that's only the beginning of the excuse. The bigger excuse is that the king doesn't like to be interrupted. Wouldn't that be nice? No phone calls. No Jehovah's Witnesses at the door. No kids talking to you through the bathroom door. Nobody swinging by because they were nearby. That's how the king lives. The penalty is death.

In chapter one we saw that it was a big deal to not come when the king calls. Now we see that it's a bigger deal to come when the king doesn't call. To prove his point- death is the penalty...and Esther reminds Mordecai that she knows this, he knows this, that everyone in the empire knows this. Obeying Mordecai's command is likely to result in Esther's death. So she raises this excuse. Unless the king feels merciful she will die.

Conversation Part 3 was Esther's excuse- she's looking out for herself. Protecting herself. The last part of the conversation is

[Conversation Part 4] Mordecai's Warning

Look with me at vv. 13-14

*Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 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 such a time as this?"*

Mordecai warns Esther that she's going to die one way or another. If all Jews in the empire will be killed, being in the palace won't protect her. She may die at the king's order for trying to save her people or she may die for simply being a Jew.

And Mordecai's warning is the culmination of the conversation that builds faith. Though Mordecai doesn't mention God's name, it's clear that he has a measure of faith that he is trying to spread to Esther.

Fathers, when you have a conversation with your children, do you view the priority as helping build their faith? When you talk to someone after church is the point to catch up on the rising price of gasoline or do you say and ask things that will build up people's faith. Teenagers, it might feel awkward and you'll need practice- but let me tell you from my time as a teenager and my time as a high school teacher: the way you can be the best friend possible is by talking to your friends about spiritual things in a way that builds up one another's faith. This will help prepare one another to put faith into action now and in the future.

Notice how Mordecai's conversation builds up Esther's faith. He reminds her of what God has done and promised. God has promised to bless the people of Abraham. He has promised David that his kingdom would one day rule the whole earth. Mordecai now believes that. He has faith. He knows that if all the Jews are eliminated those promises fail- and God will not fail. So Mordecai shares his faith. Deliverance is certain. He calls Esther to believe the same thing and to put that faith into action. God's providence has led her to be queen. Maybe the whole point of this is for her to be an agent of protection, deliverance, and salvation for her people.

[Application] Mordecai's warning falls on us too- we will not be spared death based on some situation in our lives. Money, health insurance, exercise, occupation, all these things might be factors that extend our lives- but sooner or later death will find us. Do you believe that God can and will save you? That He will deliver you?

On a scale of one to ten, how sure are you that you are going to Heaven? A 5? A 7? Our sin has so corrupted everything we do that really we should feel no confidence in ourselves. That if we rely on ourselves we would be a one out of ten. But God has also told us where deliverance has come from- it comes through Jesus Christ. He did all the work. If that's the case than you can have confidence that you will go to Heaven. If you are uncertain of your salvation it's because you've misunderstood it. If you think it has to do with works- doing enough good things and not too many bad things then there's actually a chance you don't

believe at all. Deliverance doesn't come from your works- it comes from another place- from Jesus Christ Himself. Your sins have been paid for at the cross. Your good works were earned by him in His life. Do you believe that promise this morning? That no matter how bad things might look, that God has a hold on you? That He has saved you at the cross and empty tomb in the past, that He is saving you now by grace through faith, that He will save you in the future when you pass through death?

We're seeing faith put into action. We've seen the situation for faith, we've seen the conversation that builds faith and now let's notice

### **[Main Point 3] The Application of Faith**

Lets read vv. 15-17

*Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.*

Faith acts. You aren't applying your faith if you never act in bold ways. We know that Mordecai and Esther believe here because they commit themselves to God to do as God pleases. The application is that they put faith into action. They have faith because they view God as a person- God has said that he hears the prayers of his people, so the people fast- and all fasts presume prayer to God. Seeking His help and guidance. Depending on Him. The application of faith is the willingness to die so that others might live. The ability to face discomfort and anxiety because you know it's according to God's purposes.

Mordecai and Esther haven't been very spiritual people until this chapter, but now they are people of faith. And that faith will be evident through action. You will do things that show you have a relationship with God- you'll pray. You'll fast on occasion. You'll talk to others about God's deliverance. You'll feel your dependence. I want us all to realize something. You cannot put faith into action if you are always comfortable. When you are safe, secure, protected, you aren't likely to really be putting faith into action. You might say you trust God, but do you if you aren't willing to be rejected by others? You might say you have faith,

but do you if always cave in to the pressure of those around you? You know you are putting faith into action when you are in some situations where everything might go wrong for you- like it could for Esther- and yet continue to move forward knowing that God must deliver you.

Do you feel that this morning? Do you feel like your only hope in life and death is that God owns you and promises to care for you? That He will look after you like a treasured possession? If you do you will be ready to put faith into action. We see Esther willing to accept death if it means helping God's people and building God's kingdom? I'm sure many of you are practicing for that. You are practicing faith by risking embarrassment, risking rejection, maybe just showing up here is proving that you are an example of faith like Esther is.

The big principle we should walk away from Esther 4 is the dangerous place we are all in and our need for Someone to deliver us!

[Illustration] Gravity exerts itself as a powerful force on us. The mass of the earth is so great, that sooner or later, all things within its pull will fall to the ground. I know this as I've fallen from ski lifts two different times. I heard a humorous ski lift story from a teenager several years ago. Zach was snowboarding at 49 Degrees North and he bought this big, delicious brownie from the lodge there. But before he got a chance to eat it, his friends were headed back up the mountain, so he crammed it in his pants pocket, zipped it up, and boarded the chairlift. Arriving at the top, the time came for him to coast gently off the seat. He touched his board down on the snow, but then he couldn't continue down the slope. He suddenly found himself lifted and floating through the air on his side- like he was lying in bed. He was attached to the ski lift and now he'd missed his opportunity to make his exit. The lift operator noticed Zach and stopped the lift- with Zach hanging about 10 feet in the air and a number of people standing there watching him.

What had happened is that the brownie he had zipped in his pocket had become wedged in the tight place where the seat meets the metal bar that came down from the cable up above. It was wedged so tight that the combination of fabric and baked goods could support Zach's weight. He was stuck. And he was embarrassed. That spot was so tight that it looked like the force of gravity no longer had enough power to pull Zach to earth. But the ski patrol didn't leave Zach hanging there. They had to get him back down gently because sooner or



later, something wouldn't hold. Brownie would become crumbs, zipper would fail, or pants would tear, and that powerful force of gravity would finally bring Zach down to earth. It was a certainty. They knew from experience and history what the result would be. So they acted accordingly.

[Application] Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews were found in a tight spot. They are to be totally annihilated in a few months. Their situation was so tight, that it really looked like all God's people would die. That the promised Messiah would not come. That God's purposes would fail. But they knew their history. They knew God's promises. They knew deliverance would come. It was a certainty. That at some point the tight spot they were put in by their enemies would crumble and that God would deliver them. God's power to deliver His people is much stronger and even more certain than gravity. They knew that God would deliver them in some way. They had a confident faith in who God is and that He is trustworthy. And that faith emboldened them to act. This means that you can have that really hard conversation with your spouse that you've been meaning to have. This means that you can confess that sin that you are hiding. This means that you can conquer your addictions. This means you can repair that broken relationship. But expect that you will need to act.

[Conclusion] This is the call for us today- to put faith into action. If you are not a Christian you need to trust Jesus today. You don't want to get in God's way. Nothing can stop Him. His purposes are like gravity, you can resist Him temporarily but don't think that you won't eventually crumble or tear. If you are a Christian, God has promised your full and final deliverance. He is pulling you toward Heaven. Like gravity pulls you to earth. There might be tight spots on the way there, but He will get you there. Therefore you should have confidence to act in the ways He commands you. If you will get there, then it makes sense to start walking, keep believing, start obeying. No matter how hard it gets. Even if your actions could get you killed. That's how Eric Liddell could love the people around him in the internment camp. Perhaps we'll receive a diagnosis or a death threat and we'll have to say with Esther, "If I perish, I perish," but I will act because God will ultimately deliver me and all His people.