

Crisis Management
Esther 3
Such a Time as This Week 3
9/6/15

Welcome/intro/vision

This is our third week in our series we're calling "For Such a Time as This"—we're looking at the book of Esther, written about 400 years before Christ

And Esther is a woman who has a dramatic, once-in-a-lifetime "such a time as this moment" which we're slowly building up to

We've defined a 'such a time as this moment' as when your positioning meets God's purposes

It's the right person, right place, at the right time

And in almost all of our lives we'll have a variety of such a time as this moments—
some of them are more common like a conversation with a co-worker or a child or a neighbor where it's pretty clear that you're the right person to help them out at just that moment

others of them are more mid-sized where there's a little more at stake and the consequences of what you do or don't do have a little more downstream impact for everyone involved

And then in just about all of our lives there are one or two major such-a-time-as-this moments where something happens and an opportunity or crisis hits

and what we do in that moment has vastly disproportionate impact on us and the people around us

If you're just joining us, we're a couple pages into the story of Esther

and what's happened so far in the story is that Esther is a Jew living in exile under Persian rule and she's got a whole bunch of things stacked against her: she's poor, uneducated, a peasant scraping by

But through a series of God-ordained and God-redeemed events, she wins a beauty pageant throughout Persia

Giving her the unfortunate opportunity to be king Xerxe's wife.

We've also met her cousin Mordecai who raised Esther after her parents died.

Mordecai is a quality human being who we saw last week reported an assassination plot that he overheard

even though what he most likely most wants in the whole world is for the Persian empire to disappear so that he could go home to Israel
and the quickest way to dissolve an empire is to kill off the emperor.

So Xerxes is king, Esther is improbably and suddenly the queen, and Mordecai is her cousin who does the right thing no matter what it costs him and who saved the king's life

And today we're going to meet the last of the main characters in this epic story—today we're going to meet the Darth Vader of the Esther story, and his name is Haman

And today we're going to talk about what do you do in the midst of a crisis that seems to put you in an impossible situation?

So a number of years ago in my work life I felt like I had the reverse golden touch—everything I was touching was totally disintegrating into a pitiful pile of worthlessness

And as much as I would like to think that I maintained my cool in the midst of the crisis, what actually happened was I looked something like this.

I was ranting in the house and with a mouse, in a box and with a fox, in the rain and on train and on boat and with a goat, and in a tree, I just COULD NOT let it be!

And I also struggled spiritually—I started pounding God's door asking him what his deal was, where was he, and why was he not showing up to do his thing?

Fortunately, it was just a season

But after the crisis passed I realized that the crisis hadn't just exposed some problems in what we were trying to do as an organization

The crisis had exposed some gaps inside of me.

And I realized that I needed to do some serious work to shore up those gaps inside of me
or else all the Dr. Seuss in the world wasn't going to be enough to help me to manage the next crisis situation

Today we're going to see the bad guy enter the scene. And the good guy is going to do the right thing that's going to make the bad guy so angry that's going to set off a crisis

And the issue for us today is all about crisis: HOWEVER it might come about, whether intention or un-intentional, whether it's instigated by an enemy or just a series of unfortunate events

How do we respond when crisis comes?

And in keeping with where we're headed in Esther, how does crisis relate to our such a time as this moments?

So if you've got a Bible turn with me to Esther 3, if you don't it'll be on the screen behind me

and if you don't own a Bible we've got free Bibles on the book table, we'd love for you to grab one for being here with us this morning

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. ²All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Quick poll question: how many of you have ever been in an office environment or a volunteer organization where someone got the promotion or took a new level of leadership

And as soon as it was announced you knew that they had promoted the WRONG person?

Have you ever been some place where the wrong person got the promotion and everyone BUT the boss knew it?

What does it do to morale? How do people treat that person who got the promotion?

When the narrator writes that the king had to *command* his nobles to bow to Haman, which would have been common for anyone with his titles

he's telling us that the dudes who have to work for this guy Haman know that the wrong guy got the promotion.

Mordecai also knows it, and he refuses to bow. Now, there's some back-story here that might also be coming into play—two back stories, actually

Some of you might not know the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—their story is in the book of Daniel

they live a generation or so earlier than Mordecai and Esther and they were under Babylonian rule and they refused to bow to a statue set up by the king

Mordecai is taking up their story here in his refusal to bow to Haman—he's taking a stand

If you're living in exile as an oppressed people, there comes a point where you have this Popeye Moment—remember Popeye?

Brutus would kidnap his girlfriend and tie her to the train tracks and Popeye would try to rescue her but he'd get beat up

And just when Olive Oil seems lost and Popeye's thrashed over in the corner, Popeye declares: "I've stands all I can stands and I can't stands no more!"

He eats his spinach and saves the day

Mordecai here decides he just can't stand any more!

He's a Jew living among Persians and he's worked hard to be a good, law-abiding resident of Susa, he's worked hard to do the "when in Persia do as the Persians" thing without violating his own faith

And in this time and in this culture there's nothing innately wrong with bowing to other people, it's just a part of the cultural practices and Jews would bow to one another regularly as a sign of respect

But Mordecai is drawing a line at bowing to Haman—just not going to do this thing

My friends, if you're a Jesus follower here in this culture, we have two equally important commands that we have to follow

The first is that we are called to LOVE this culture like Jesus loved it

the biblical story is that Jesus has been sent by God because he so loved this world that he didn't condemn it or ignore it but laid his life down for it

God didn't wait for us to love him first before he gave his son for us, he died first, then called us to love him.

We are called to a radical, self-sacrificial love for all of our neighbors, even and especially those who drive us crazy and even and especially those who hate Christians

Our first commandment is to love this world and love the people around us.

But the second command at the other end of the spectrum is that we're called to remain distinctive, to not walk in the ways of this world.

We are called to love this place but not comply with this place

If we're serious about following Jesus we will love this place more than any of our neighbors and we will opt-out and draw different lines than any of our neighbors

Mordecai draws a line at bowing to Haman. There's nothing in the 10 Commandments that told Haman that he shouldn't do it, he just has a conviction in his spirit that this is a line he needs to hold

If you're a Jesus-person here this morning, what lines are you facing that you might need to draw?

Where is God stirring in your spirit to say "there's nothing explicitly in the Scriptures about that, but I'm calling you to draw a line right there and hold it, even if NOBODY else does so?"

But there's more than just Mordecai feeling a personal conviction about this whole situation

There's a history here between people-groups. Haman is an Agagite. It is almost certain that this means he's descended from King Agag who we meet in 1 Samuel, many hundreds of years before this

And King Agag was king of a people called the Amalekites, and the Amalekites and the Jews have been in conflict for centuries

We looked at the book of Exodus back in February and after the Israelites flee Egypt and make it through the Red Sea, the first people who oppose them are the Amalekites

this is their first armed conflict EVER as a nation and it's with the Amalekites, Haman's ancestors

These people have been fighting for hundreds and hundreds of years and to the original readers of this story, they see not only two individuals at odds

But hundreds of years of ethnic and racial and historical tensions being played out

This past spring I took a seminary class that was all about a Christian approach to Conflict

Of course it was all hypothetical and foreign to me because around here at Chatham Community Church we never have ANY conflict!

And one of the things we talked about was that conflict has a number of levels to it and at the top is what it looks like it's about—the content of the conflict

Your boss gave you too much work, your spouse forgot it was their day to pick up the kids, Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman

But UNDERNEATH the content of the conflict a whole set of other things feeding into the conflict:

you're not JUST upset because your boss gave you too much work, you're upset because for the past 6 months you've been saying that they need to hire another person to do all this work

you're not JUST upset because your spouse forgot it was their day to pick up the kids, you're upset because they've forgotten every week for the past 6 weeks this was their day to pick up the kids!

There's often history to conflicts. And deeper issues than just what's being presented.

In your life, in the conflicts you're dealing with right now, it's important to get to the history behind the conflict

In order for conflict to be fruitful rather than destructive we have to get to root issues and history in order to get to the heart of the matter

Mordecai refuses to bow down in part because of the long and painful history between the Amalekites and the Jews

And as we've already seen from Mordecai, when he's made up his mind to do what he understands as the right thing to do, he's going to do it, even at great risk to himself

But I don't think he or anyone else saw what was coming, here's what happens next:

³Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" ⁴Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

Any of you have a sibling who you thought got away with more stuff with your parents? Like they didn't do the dishes and somehow didn't get in trouble but if you did that you'd get in heaps of trouble?

How many of you therefore delighted to tattle on that sibling if they did something wrong?

The royal officials had to be ordered to bow to Haman because they weren't going to do it voluntarily, so they're doing it

but Mordecai refuses to do it! And he seems to be getting away with it!

And so the royal officials like kids upset at someone getting away with something they wish THEY could get away with

Tell Haman, who apparently was oblivious prior to all of this

Ladies and gentlemen, some of us really don't like it when someone gets away with something. It pushes a button in us at some deep place

And mostly that's healthy—we should have a reaction when someone gets away with something—injustice is wrong and often we need to address it

But before we get on our high horse and start our own personal crusade, we need to do a quick check to look: what button just got pushed? Was it a good button, a wise button, a holy button?

Or is this actually just more about us, about my desire to complain and stir up trouble?

Because let's be honest, some of us just like drama. We like reporting drama, we like getting folks in trouble, we like stirring up trouble, we just like spreading ill-report and negativity.

And the Scriptures call you to quit it. Stop. Right now. If you're a Jesus-person, you don't own your tongue, Jesus does and you're using it in ways that he does not approve of.

There is a time and a place to report injustice or make a stand or call someone out and do so courageously and boldly

But there is a time when we must simply hold our tongues because the reaction that's being evoked inside of us and the button that's being pushed

is not a holy or good button, it's a selfish button, a drama button, a we love gossiping about people button, and we need to embrace the discipline of silence

These guards are not only eager to stir up trouble, we get the racism and racial undertones here at the end—he's a Jew! That makes it even worse!

This is a racial issue! I want to take a moment to talk to my white friends here, especially those of us who were raised in predominantly white churches

Most of us who grew up in white churches were never taught to see race and racial issues in the Bible—we just never talked about it

And so we subconsciously screen those issues out when we're reading the Bible and it's right in front of us, not even realizing that we're doing it.

And so because of that, sometimes we think that race doesn't matter to God

and that all of this talk about issues of racism or racial injustice is just arbitrary or something that's kind of happening in the world but God doesn't say anything about it.

But let me help us to take those lenses off so that we can see a little bit better:

In almost every single book of the Bible issues of race and ethnicity plays some role in what's being talked about

in fact, I'm going to ahead and say that there's not a single book in the Bible where race is not a factor in what's happening at some point in the text

The whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is filled with issues of race, racial injustice, and tensions and conflicts and

ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT goals of redemption and God's purposes in the world is that he's promised to gather together and heal ALL people intentionally racial and ethnic lines

it is one of the most dominant and most important themes in the whole Bible that those of us who grew up in white churches never talked about

In order to understand what's going on in the Scriptures, some of who grew up in the church have to un-learn some of the blinders that were taught to us so that we can see the whole picture

My hope is that Chatham Community Church will not be a community where we ignore this huge biblical theme but that we learn to see it and understand how it plays into the bigger issues

The palace officials don't like that Mordecai is getting away with something they wish they could get away with—they're even more upset about it because he's a Jew

So here's what happens next:

⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

Okay so this goes from telling mom and dad about your sibling who didn't finish doing the dishes to Defcon crazy in just a few sentences

Haman ALSO knows his history, he knows his people and the Jews have a long-running feud

So here's what he does next:

⁷In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, this is super-helpful because it tells us when all this goes down—Esther was crowned queen in the 7th year of Xerxes reign, this happens in the 12th year. So Esther has been queen for 5 years now, I did that math in my head! ***the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on^athe twelfth month, the month of Adar. Haman tossed a dice to decide when to do issue this awful law***

⁸Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents^b of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 “Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.”

Haman is not a very nice guy which is probably what makes him such a brilliant politician!

And notice that what he tells Xerxes is a mixture of truth, half-truths, and lies:

The truth is that the Jewish people DO have different customs, the half-truth is that they obey most of the king's laws, they're not just out there introducing anarchy everywhere

And the lie is that it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them—as if they're some pernicious influence at work in the kingdom

So Haman is a very persuasive speaker and Xerxes continues to show himself to be a very weak king—he doesn't bother doing any sort of research, doesn't get a second opinion, nothing

He just hands over the signet ring from his finger—that's the point in the movie where you're like “NO! Don't do it! Don't give that much power over to the bad guy!”

He gives Haman a blank check to do whatever he wants to do with the Jewish people.

Moral of this story if you're a manager is: first, don't promote the wrong person and secondly if you DO promote the wrong person just know that you're going to have to do more work on the back-end because you can't trust what they tell you!

...13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods...

One of the parts of my job that is both hard but also good is that I get to help people walk through difficult seasons of life

And one of the most difficult things I deal with is when people do the right thing and they somehow get punished for it

this seems to happen especially in a work environment, but sometimes in family situations and conflicts too, right?

Well in this passage Mordecai has done the right thing—he's refusing to bow down to this bully and he likely knew that he could face some consequences for doing this

But I don't think he had any idea that it would unleash defcon crazy from Haman

That it would mean the creation of law that might mean the extermination of all his people from the face of the earth

And we'll see in the next chapter that Mordecai is pretty sure that God's got this, but you have to wonder if at points he regretted taking his stand, right?

I mean, have you ever done the right thing, gotten serious push-back and negative consequences for it, and wondered if it was worth it?

Mordecai un-intentionally sets off a series of unfortunate events and here it is: crisis is here and it's coming to his people.

And what Mordecai and Esther do next in the midst of this crisis is going to be the turning point in this whole story and that's what we'll look at next week

But for today, before we get to what THEY do next, I want us to pause and think about what do WE do when we're faced with crisis.

How do you respond when things take a dramatic turn for the worst? Chances are there are a couple of you who had some sort of a crisis moment even just in the past week.

How do you respond in a crisis moment?

Crisis moments are intensely loaded up with the potential for loss!

If you're invested heavily in the stock market, these past two weeks have been crisis moments!

Some of us have hit crisis moments in mid-life, where we feel the clock ticking and wonder if we've spent the first half of our lives chasing after the right or the wrong things

Some of us have had crisis moments in our marriages where we've been on the brink of staying or leaving

Some of us have had crisis moments with our health where the news from the doctor was scary and we were staring down a significant threat to our lives

Some of us have had crisis moments at work where the deadline is here but the project got delayed and the boss isn't happy and the customer isn't happy

And what you do next or what you say next might make the difference between having a job or not having a job the next day

Nobody wants a crisis! Crisis is pain, it's anxiety, it's fear, it's pressure, it often feels like a detour or an obstacle or a massive obstruction on the highway of your life

And if we're thinking about it from the perspective of a such a time as this moment and if we're thinking through the lens of what has God put me here to do

A crisis often feels like an obstacle to getting there! The crisis feels like a distraction from what I'm supposed to be about, an unforeseen block towards getting to my such a time as this moment

Because what we want in our lives is to go from skipping through the dandelions and playing with bunnies straight into our such a time as this moment!

But what we see throughout the Bible and really throughout history is this perhaps disappointing and difficult reality: ***the crisis is the moment.***

The crisis is the such-a-time-as-this moment. Crisis not an obstacle to the moment. It's not the thing in the way of your purpose here on earth.

Throughout history, from Moses to Jesus to Martin Luther King Junior, the crisis is the moment.

And so while we're here in Esther 3, at the unveiling of the crisis, and before we get to the wonderful and wise and faith-filled response of Esther and Mordecai let's pause here and do a little inventory and come back to the question

What's been your response to crisis? What kind of track record do you have when it comes to crisis?

And I want to do this in a very neutral, almost clinical kind of way. There's no judgment here, we're just taking an honest look in the mirror:
looking back over the crisis moments in your life, how have you responded?

Have you tended to check out, dis-engage, avoid when it came crisis time?
Do you find yourself escaping towards alcohol or drugs? Do you find yourself in crisis looking to escape by burying yourself in media, in books, anything to get out from under it?

Or do you just dissolve under the weight of it
Crises are intense! Maybe you've felt that weight and that intensity in the past and just come crashing down physically, emotionally

Do you get more aggressive when crisis comes? Take the bull by the horns, get angry, get more in charge, more directive, you're going to fix this thing.

What does crisis do to you spiritually? Mordecai accidentally unleashes genocide by doing what he understands in this situation to be the right thing

How do you respond to God when you do the right thing and he doesn't seem to come through for you to defend you but instead you seem to get punished for it?

Some of you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, but crisis seems to often surface bigger questions of God and providence and who's in charge and orchestrating things out there.

Others of us would call ourselves Christians but crisis can push us to re-think or struggle with things we previously took for granted about God's goodness and his work on our behalf.

Here's what crisis does: crisis shows us our character and our theology

We talked about character last week: that's who we actually are underneath the façade—who we are when no one's looking

Don't get thrown off by the word theology—ALL of us have theology, from atheists to really religious people, to people who are apathetic

We've all got SOME SORT of theology and what crisis does is it reveals and exposes what we actually believe about God

If crisis reveals all of this, what can you learn about yourself and what you actually believe about God as you look back over how you've handled the crises in your life?

And I'm not going to over-define crisis here because crisis is in the eye of the beholder, right? A bad haircut isn't a crisis to me but it might be to you! That's fine!

What does your response to your bad haircut or your bad performance review or your marriage situation or your medical issue

show you about what you believe about God and what lies underneath in your heart?

No guilt, not piling on top of you about anything

We're just taking a learning posture and seeing what we can honestly learn about who we are and what we believe about God by looking back on our times of crisis

And I'm not really talking about your initial response, often our initial response to crisis is freak-out, and that's fine and normal, give yourself tons of grace for that

But after that initial shock wore off, and the initial dust settled, what came next?

That doesn't tell you EVERYTHING about what you believe about God and about who you are at the core, but it certainly gives you some pretty significant information

At some points in our lives, the crisis will be the such a time as this moment.

Not EVERY crisis moment is a such a time as this moment, but every crisis has opportunities to respond in faith, hope, and love or fear, guilt, pride or shame

And while we're looking back, I want to invite you, without a whole bunch of shame or guilt, but as clearly and clinically as possible

To assess: what have been the *consequences* to how you've responded to crisis in the past?

Can you name missed opportunities, damage done to people, ways that you've reacted or responded that just aren't who you want to be or what you want to be about?

Or maybe on the flip side, you can see in a couple of situations ways that you acted that were courageous, wise, and right on point that totally made all the difference in how that situation went down

Where the BEST you showed up and you know it

Maybe there are some bright spots in how you've handled things in the past that you want to habituate and say to God and to yourself: "I want to lean more into THAT!"

And if we turn our eyes from looking backward to looking forward
if God is positioning you for your such a time as this moment
and if that moment is somehow loaded up in a crisis moment or crisis situation

What would need to be the same and what would need to be different about how you've responded in the past in order for you to be ready for a such a time as this crisis moment in the future?

What can you pre-decide this week, today, about who you want to be and what you want to do in the next moment of crisis so that when it comes, you'll be ready?

Mordecai has his Popeye moment, decides he has to draw this line and he's not going to bow to Haman

and that decision unleashes unforeseen consequences that lead to this crisis moment

And what HE does next is going to change the course of history forever—because this crisis IS his such a time as this moment.

And today, as we look back over our own crisis moments, the invitation is for us to learn, to grow

and to ask God to help us as we see both our gaps in our responses and the good things that we've done

And to prepare us, to grow us up, to mature us in our response to crisis so that we might be ready for our such a time as this moments

And the place where our gaps and failures meet his mercy and where our mistakes meet his redeeming power is here, at the table where we'll celebrate communion today

Ever since sin entered this world, we've been in something of a state of crisis—nothing is fully as it should be.

And because God loves this world, he came to save it, to redeem it. Redeem is such a great word—we deem something of worth and value.

God deemed this world valuable and very very good when he created it.

It lost value when sin entered into the world and corrupted all our relationships: with God, with one another, with creation and nature

But what God does in Christ Jesus is RE-deem it—re-ascribe to it worth and value all over again.

He does this by entering into this world and coming to his own crisis moment—on the night he was betrayed, he had a meal with his closest followers

And he took common elements like bread and wine and said: this bread is my body and this wine is my blood

He was giving these up for the re-demption of this world, to reconcile all things, to make all things new again, healed, restored for good

And then in the next couple of hours, Jesus entered into the crisis of what was before him

he could have just run, escaped, called down angels to fight for him, or even just given up and rolled over

But if crisis exposes our theology and our character, what we see in Jesus is the ultimate display of both:

he trusts that the Father has sent him to lay down his life and he trusts that the Father has the power to raise him back up to life again

and he has the character to ACT in faith on those promises of his good Father and he embraces and goes to the cross for you and for me.

We are now re-deemed, given value and you are now TWO times valuable and TWO times loved by God

you were made in God's image to begin with and you have been bought back with the blood of Christ

And today we celebrate Jesus' faithful obedience in the midst of his crisis and how that blessed each of us individually and ultimately blesses the entire world

This morning, if you have committed yourself to Jesus, this table is for you. It is our monthly celebration of the ultimate act of courage and faith by Jesus to rescue us and re-deem us

If you're not yet a Jesus-follower, we invite you to consider what this meal is speaking to you, to pray about it, to engage with God over it, and see if he might speak a word of grace over you in a new way today

If he is, if you want in on this great work of redemption and grace, we've got prayer ministers in the back and they would love to pray with you and help you to receive this grace

And then we welcome you to come to the table and join in the feast!

For everyone and anyone, if you've got something that you feel you need prayer for as you come to celebrate Christ

maybe you're in a crisis RIGHT NOW and you're struggling with either what's happening all around you

or maybe you're struggling this morning with what you're seeing inside of you that's being unearthed in the process

Those folks will be there to pray for you and with you.

Going to move to a time of singing now and stations all around the room.

Whenever you're ready, feel free to get up and come to the tables—eat and drink there at the tables, feel free to step to the side and have a moment with the Lord

And then leave your cup there. The bread is gluten free and the cup is grape juice so that everyone can participate

My friends, come and join the feast: when Christ faced his crisis, he acted faithfully and with tremendous character to bless you this morning, no matter what you've done or what you're facing.

Benediction: Prayer room open