

Stepping Out On The Promises of God

Please turn with me to Esther 7. At the youth camp our youth go to one of the popular free time activities is a zip line that runs over a pond. I went on it for the first time a couple of years ago. You walk up a 40 ft tower and at the top they strap you into a harness and you ride the zip line to the other side of the pond. Now I'm afraid of heights so once they strapped me in and I walked to the edge of the platform, I had a really hard time taking that step off the platform into thin air. I knew from observing that the line would hold me. I knew that I was harnessed in. But psychologically I just had a hard time stepping off a solid structure onto no structure. I ended up (and this is really wimpy) sitting down and scootching myself off of the platform. The funny thing is, once I left the platform I wasn't afraid anymore and I totally enjoyed the ride, knowing it was strong enough to hold me up. It was that first step off the security of the platform that was the hardest!

A lot of times the hardest step for the Christian is the first step off the solid platform of safety and security and onto the risk (and adventure) of trusting God's promises. That's the step that Esther has to take in chapter 7. Will she stay on the platform of the security of her position as queen and keep quiet, or will she speak up and put her life in the hands of God? There's an old hymn called *Standing on the Promises of God* but this morning I want us to consider the promises of God, not from the vantage point of standing on them, but from the point where, like Esther, we have to take that first step onto them. *Stepping Out on The Promises of God.*

For the sake of our visitors let me give a quick overview of the story so far. After banishing his queen from his presence in anger, the king of Persia decides to hold an empire wide beauty contest to choose a new queen to replace Vashti. He chooses a beautiful young Jewish girl named Esther and she becomes the new queen of Persia. Esther's parents had died when she was young and her older cousin Mordecai raised her like his own daughter. At about the same time, Mordecai happens to overhear a plot to assassinate the king and he warns Esther who warns the king.

In chapter 3 we read that the king promotes an evil dude named Haman to second in command over all of Persia. Haman hates Mordecai because Mordecai won't bow down before him and in his anger Haman decides to kill all of Mordecai's people, the Jews. Haman sets a date when every Jewish man, woman, and child is to be executed in cold blood, and he gets the king to authorize it. When Mordecai hears of this edict he convinces Esther that it is her God-given destiny to use her position as queen to appeal to the king for her people to be spared. The problem is the king hasn't called for Esther in over 30 days and to approach the king without first being called for meant certain death even for the queen, unless the king decided to show favor and lower his golden scepter to you. When Esther approaches the king, he does lower his scepter and asks Esther what it is she wants. She doesn't tell him, but simply invites him and Haman to a feast that she has prepared for them. At the end of that feast, he again asks what is so important that she would risk her life, and again she doesn't tell him but again invites him and Haman to one more feast where she promises that she will reveal her request. That is where we pick up the story in chapter 7.

Esther 7:1-2

This is that "step off the platform" moment for Esther. Although the king seems ready to grant Esther's request, King Ahasuerus was an unpredictable and volatile man. History records a time when one of the

king's most trusted officials asked him if his oldest son (he had five sons) could be excused from military service on an upcoming campaign. The king was so infuriated by this request he cut the oldest son in half and had his army march in between the two halves. This was not a man you wanted to get on the wrong side of! Esther was about to reveal to the king after five years of marriage that she was Jewish and she was about to accuse his right hand man, the man he trusted most and depended on most, of devising an evil plot - a plot that the king himself had signed into law. To make this step off the platform worse, Haman is sitting right there. We might wonder why Esther invited Haman to the feast. Why she didn't arrange a private meeting just between her and the king? Esther chose not only to accuse Haman of evil, she was about to do it face to face. And in this we learn something from Esther's example.

1. Sometimes stepping out on God's promises means facing our fears

Charlie Brown once said, "there is no problem so big I can't run away from it." Esther doesn't run away from her problem, she faces it head on. She's not only going to expose Haman's evil to the king, she's going to do it with him sitting there. Esther isn't supergirl. She is probably very much afraid for her life. This could go really badly really quickly. These are the two most powerful men in the world. One of them has a terrible temper and the other is an evil and cunning man. But for Esther stepping out on God's promises meant trusting God and facing her fears.

Through God's word, we know that God is all powerful. He is sovereign, which means He is ultimately in control over everything. Through God's word we learn that God promises to save all those who believe in His Son Jesus and deliver us from evil, that He loves His children and that He is faithful to keep His promises,. But there is a way that we experience God's power and love and faithfulness firsthand when we step out on His promises that we never do if we never leave the security of the platform and lean our weight entirely on God's faithfulness.

Last week Luke and Lauren shared about what they're calling their Thailand adventure. And it is an adventure. But that doesn't mean that there won't be times when they struggle with fear. This has been a dream in their hearts for years but recently they have taken some big steps off the platform and onto the zip line of trusting God. And with something this big, they will probably be stepping off of platforms onto the promises of God again and again. God doesn't promise them that it will always be easy, but He promises that He will always be with them. That He will be faithful.

That first step onto God's promises can come in many different forms. It might mean breaking the sound barrier and sharing the gospel with someone when we're really afraid they might reject us or we might look foolish. It might mean doing what we know is right even though it isn't popular. Sometimes stepping off the platform onto God's promises means facing a problem that we've been running away from and sometimes it means doing something we feel God is leading us to do but honestly we're afraid to do it. And I feel like this is important to say: God cares about every aspect of your life, not just the "overtly spiritual" aspects. So trying something new, accepting a new challenge in life, expanding your social circle by making new friends, getting a new job, all these things can be a way of stepping off the platform onto God's promises. Sometimes stepping onto God's promises means facing our fears and often it's that first step off the platform where we're committed to trusting God's promises that is the hardest and scariest step to take.

It must have been scary for Esther to step out and finally verbalize the request she has of the king, but

she was never safer than that moment for a King far more powerful than Ahasuerus was guiding the events, and she'd soon see that God would hold her up. Our God is faithful, not some of the time, but all of the time. But there's another lesson we can learn from Esther's example.

2. Stepping out on God's promises doesn't mean we shouldn't step out wisely

Esther 7:3-4

When the king asks, what is your wish and what is your request, it's two ways of saying the same thing: what do you want, Esther? But Esther breaks her request down into two related components: *If I have found favor in your sight, O king (she's respectful), let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request.* Let me and my people live.

Listen now to how she threads the needle without being offensive to the king. Remember, he's the one who signed this edict that has jeopardized the Jews, but she is careful to say it in a passive way that doesn't even hint of an accusation against the king: *For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.* She then goes on to say, king, if all that was going to happen was that we were sold into slavery I wouldn't even be troubling you with this, but we haven't been sold into slavery, we've been sold into death. Esther is careful not to needlessly accuse or offend the king. Tact isn't a sign of cowardice or lack of faith, it's a fruit of wisdom.

Sometimes stepping onto God's promises involves saying things that are hard to say. But trusting God doesn't have to mean abandoning tact and wisdom. Over the years I've heard people say things in the name of God that violated basic wisdom and tact. I can think of a specific time when someone unloaded what they said was a burden from God and it left several people offended and angry because it was inappropriate and unwise on many levels. I've done it too. Just this past week I remembered an old friendship that was torched because I stuck my nose into a sensitive situation he was going through without having all the facts, and yet I felt called by God to confront him with what at the time I thought was God's word for him. We can and will miss it sometimes, but it's good to think carefully about what we say, especially in very sensitive situations. Wisdom, tact, sensitivity, love - these things don't negate faith, they compliment it.

Esther is clearly being guided by God, and she is seriously stepping out in faith. But God leads her to be wise - very wise - in how she speaks. We can learn from her good example.

Now as the story winds out, we see that Esther has taken the hard step and from here on it's in the hands of God. **Read vv. 5-7**

The English loses some of the bite of this dialogue between the king and Esther, but in the Hebrew it's quite compelling. The king spits out *who and where is he who has dared to do this (threaten the life of my queen)?* And Esther spits back out in a way that mirrors the violence of the king's question: *A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!*

The king is so angry he can't just sit there - he gets up and goes out to the garden. Here is where a very politically sensitive situation comes to the front. The king is furious, but he knows that he signed the edict Esther is talking about. How can he punish Haman for a wicked plot that he joined in on? And remember, when a Persian king issued a law, it could never be revoked. The king is not only angry, he also isn't sure

what to do. And as we've learned, King Ahasuerus hated making big decisions without getting input from others and there's no one here to advise him. What is he to do? What can he do?

Haman is terrified for his life. He sees that the king means to do him harm and in his terror he does something no one is supposed to do: he falls onto the couch where Esther is sitting to beg her mercy. As an aside, if Haman had been a decent man who had made a very bad mistake, or even an evil man who was genuinely repenting, no doubt Esther would have had pity on him, but he is an evil man and if his life had been spared, he'd just work out his murderous plans another way. So as he falls on the couch to plead for his life just as the king walks back in. And now the king sees he has an excuse to execute Haman without making it about their joint plan.

Vv. 8-10

In his desperation Haman violated courtly protocol in that no one was to touch or get too close to the king's wives, but there is no way that the king could have seriously believed that Haman was sexually attacking the queen. What the king saw was a way of punishing Haman without it being over a plan that the king himself had approved. He could execute Haman without hurting his own pride. Ironically, Haman is hung on the very gallows that he intended for Mordecai to be executed on.

Ultimately it wasn't King Ahasuerus that hung Haman on the gallows. It was the One who is never mentioned by name in the book of Esther: the King of kings, the Lord of lords, God Almighty. Haman was reaping what he sowed.

- *The righteous is delivered from trouble and it comes to the wicked instead. Prov. 11:8*
- *They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. Job 4:8*
- *He who sows wickedness reaps trouble. Prov. 22:8*

Paul writes, *do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (Gal. 6:7)* Haman sowed anger towards Mordecai, he reaped anger from the king. He sowed a plan to kill Mordecai and the Jews, and he reaped being killed by the king. He sowed a plan to bring disaster to God's people and he reaped disaster for his own life.

God is never mentioned in the book of Esther, but His fingerprints are all over this book. We learn from Esther that God can be trusted. We learn from Haman that God is not to be messed with. It's very important we view God correctly. Some people view God as an angry God who's just itching to fry sinners with His judgment. This is a God we don't want to draw near to. Others view God as the lovable Grandpop who rocks in His heavenly rocking chair and smiles on pretty much anything we do. This is a God we can't take seriously. The Bible tells us that God is a righteous Judge, that He must judge all sin, and that His anger is more terrible than the anger of any earthly king. But God is also love, and He loves fallen sinners so much that, at great personal sacrifice, God Himself made a way to remove our judgment. God's Son, Jesus, hung on a gallows - a cross - in our place paying the full price for our sin so that we would never have to. We could never earn that, we could never be good enough to deserve it, and we can never repay it. God offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift to all sinners.

But there is something we have to do to receive it. We have to step out on God's promises by believing in Jesus Christ. That's the most important first step off the platform - to not trust religion or good works or charitable acts or that God will just overlook your sin - and to trust that there is only one way to enter

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heaven, and that's by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* If you have never trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, will you step out in faith and believe in him this morning? Someone has to pay for our sins. Because God is just, He cannot just ignore them or allow them to go unpaid. Jesus died in order to pay for our sins, but if we don't accept that gift, then on the day when we face God, He will respect our choice and lay our guilt and sin on our own shoulders. Will you step off the platform and trust totally in Jesus Christ this morning?

Let's pray.