

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT TIMES

(Book of Esther)

While Evil Flourishes

WELCOME – Good morning SABC, I bring you greetings from your mission team in Nova Fronteira, Pará, Brazil where God's truth is marching on. Here in Transamazônica your team has seen the power of God's Word in the Gospel transform lives as we shared that glorious truth from house to house yesterday, and as we taught Sunday School and led in worship this morning.

For our guests, let me introduce myself. I am Mike Claunch, the very blessed pastor of all these wonderful believers surrounding you. Everybody just calls me Bro. Mike. And guests, let me say that I am delighted that you have come to worship the Lord with us this day, and I look forward to meeting you in person. Our team will return before next Sunday, so if you can join us again then, I would love to shake your hand and greet you in person.

Today, however, I would be so grateful to you if you would take one of our welcome cards from the pew rack in front of you and share some basic information about yourself which will enable us to share some things about our church with you. You can put the welcome card in the offering plate in a little while, or you can give it to one of our staff members in the mall area after the service if you prefer.

Tomorrow marks the celebration of the birthday of our nation. Some of us remember a time when things that are truly Christian and things that are American had a large overlap. I remember my third grade teacher in the public schools of Houston, Texas who prayed like a missionary and preached the gospel as fervently as any evangelist I ever heard. And she did it in the classroom with the Amen of the principal, school board, governor, and president.

Sadly, these things are no more in our land. We have a president with more sympathy for Islam than for Christianity and not much understanding of either. We have a Supreme Court that attempts to usurp the Word and laws of the Creator Himself. Increasingly across our land, if someone utters the name of Jesus as an expletive or in combination with profanity, hardly anyone takes notice; but if someone dares to speak the name that is above every name in prayer then someone is losing their job or going to jail.

This reality leaves many of us who are both born again Christians and also Americans with a growing tension between our faith and our patriotism. Let me share with you how I resolve that tension and come to peace with it in my own life. The answer comes to two words: **Gratitude and Prayer**

It was God who determined my national heritage. God caused me to be born in the United States of America, and I thank Him for it. I look for those ways that God has demonstrated His sovereignty and His providence in our national life, and I find many places where I believe I see His fingerprints. I am grateful that across the years we have had presidents who claimed to be followers of Christ, men who prayed God honoring prayers, portions of which we listened to at the opening of this service. I am grateful that we had founding fathers who had enough wisdom to draw many of the principles that would be the building blocks of this new nation directly from the pages of Holy Scripture. I am grateful that there have been periods of our history when large portions of our population humbled themselves before Almighty God, turned from their sin, and put their faith in the Lord Jesus and followed Him. The Bible tells us that every good gift comes from God. These were good gifts from God, and it is right and good and Christian to acknowledge those good gifts and thank Him for them.

But if ever there was a time that God's people, Christians, should humble themselves and pray, seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways, surely it is now here in America. So I pray for our nation. I cry out to God for our country. Many have been the times that I have wept before the Lord for our national sins. I continue to mourn the wholesale slaughter of unborn babies in America. I am disheartened that so many who live in the melting pot of the world cannot see beyond the color of a person's skin. I grieve that in so many areas of our national life we call evil good and good evil. I am sickened at modern arrogance that boasts itself to be smarter than God concerning the origin of the universe, human sexuality, and marriage. Both as a Christian, and as an American, I do what I can to turn the tide on these and other issues, but the thing I can do most concerning them is to pray.

I resolve the tension between my faith and my patriotism the same way I teach Brazilians to resolve that same tension in their lives. Be grateful for anything and everything God has done in working in the life of your country. Be much in prayer for every way that your nation rebels against God and chooses to walk in its own way. I believe that is God's instruction to us, whatever national heritage the Lord has chosen for us.

I hope that principle can guide us in worship today. We do not worship the United States of America, nor her way of life, in the past or the present. We worship God alone who has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. But part of our worship, an important part of our worship, is the expression of gratitude. We mingle that with our prayers, some said, some sung, some the silent pleadings of our heart, for God to yet work again in our nation to bring our people to repentance for sins, personal and national, and to faith in the Lord Jesus, which can only take place on the personal level.

So dear brother and sister in the Lord, would you join me in worship of our Wonderful God with thanksgiving and prayer.

TEXT: Esther 5:1-8

INTRODUCTION: May the words of that song become the earnest prayer of our heart.

Renew our faith, restore in us

The solemn cry, “In God we trust.”

And in the wonderful providence of God, I think we will find where we are today in the Book of Esther, our text is sending us a similar message.

By the way, I know you must be wondering why I have pre-recorded this sermon for you and had it played while I was leading a mission team in Brazil.

First let me say that the reason is not because I did not have men of God who were more than capable of substituting for me today, on our staff and otherwise. Certainly it was not out of a lack of confidence in anyone’s ability to bring the Word of God to you this morning. My norm for when I am gone will remain to enlist one of our Associate Pastors or another man of God to fill the pulpit in my absence. In addition to that being a great help to me, I think it is good for you to hear other preachers from time to time.

I had a special purpose today, and it is two-fold.

- One is that it is GOD AND COUNTRY DAY in our church, and God has put a special message on my heart about us as Christians and our relationship to our country.
- This message flows out of our study of the BOOK OF ESTHER, and we are at the peak of the drama in this study. I simply felt the need to not interrupt the study and bring you this Word that I believe God has put upon my heart.

Now, I suspect that most of you have not really thought much about the storyline of the Book of Esther since last Sunday, so let me offer a very brief refresher that I trust will help those of you who are new today or those have been gone the last week or two.

- **Esther is a young Jewish woman abducted** along with many other young women, **by officers of Persia and imprisoned in the harem of the king Ahasuerus**, who was seeking a new wife.
- **Although she did not seek it, Esther was chosen by the king to become his wife and the Queen of the Empire of Persia.**
- **Meanwhile, a wicked advisor to the king has persuaded him to enact a decree that all the Jews in the empire will be killed in a single day in the months to come.**
- **Esther’s older cousin Mordecai**, who had adopted Esther after her parents died, **has led his fellow Jews in crying out to God and pleading for his saving intervention.**
- **Mordecai also sent a message to Queen Esther asking her to appeal to the king to somehow spare the Jews from annihilation.**

- **Esther responded that for her to go to the king without invitation put her own life at great risk.**
- **However, sensing that God had caused her to become the Queen of Persia for such a time as this, she agreed to go to the king, saying, “If I perish, I perish.”**

And so we pick up the story in Esther chapter 5 to see what God is going to do.

Esther 5:1–8 1 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.

2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

3 And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!”

4 So Esther answered, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”

5 Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

6 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!”

7 Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request is this:

8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”

You may be saying, what? That’s all? We don’t even get to read her making her request and what the king answers?

Nope, not in chapter 5 and not in chapter 6. We don’t come to the second banquet where the request is made until chapter 7!

Why not? Because my friend, God is working. God is working in things that Esther knows nothing about.

Friend, **when God is ready, the question will be ready.**

When God is ready, the answer will be ready as well!

So what do we see in this tiny little part of the story? What is our instruction from chapter 5?

WHILE EVIL FLOURISHES, FAITH SUSTAINS THE FAITHFUL.

Listen, at this moment in our story,

- **Evil still overflows but Esther is watching, waiting on the Lord.**
- **Esther is still captured by the forces of evil, but she is trusting God.**
- **Even greater evil is plotted against Esther and all the Jews, so they cry out to God.**
- **Esther is right in the middle of it all, so she purposes in her heart to obey God.**
- **Now, while evil flourishes, faithful Esther is sustained by her faith in God!**

You and I may want an answer now. We don't want to wait to know what she says and then what he says and ultimately what God is going to do.

But Esther is content to keep trusting the Lord and wait on Him. She is not only willing to not blurt out her request as soon as she touches the royal scepter, but she has prepared a banquet for the king and Haman. And then we read that even then she will not reveal her desire, but prepares another banquet.

- And we say, Lord where is Esther keeping this barrel of patience she is drawing on. I need some of that. But, my friend, although patience is good, that is not the secret here. Esther has obeyed God. **Now, even while evil still flourishes, faithful Esther is sustained by her faith in God!**

And it is important to note this:

THE FAITH OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER WAS IN GOD, NOT THE KING.

While Esther was hoping for a positive reaction from the king, she did not consider the response of the king to be the final word. God has the final word! Esther was trusting God to make this thing right, not trusting her persuasiveness with the king.

So God gave her peace in the middle of the storm of evil. So what were they to do?

THE ROLE OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER

- **PRAY**
- **DO WHAT WAS IN THEIR POWER TO DO TO PROMOTE RIGHTEOUSNESS**
 - Do good as a citizen (Mordecai reported the plot to assassinate the king)
 - Appeal to the king to allow the Jews to protect themselves

Brothers and sisters, there are a multitude of applications here to be made in whatever evil surrounds us and whatever kind of difficulty through which we are navigating.

But God has put upon my heart to make an application that we all need as citizens of the United States of America at this particular moment.

Who can deny that here in America

- **Evil overflows.**
- **The forces of evil have captured, imprisoned many Christians in taking away their jobs, their businesses, their freedom**
- **The evil one himself wants to kill us, steal from us, destroy every good and righteous thing.**
- **We are caught in the middle. As we approach the November election, each of us will be in the middle concerning our pending vote.**
- **What are we to do?**

First we must remember

OUR FAITH AS AMERICAN CHRISTIANS IS NOT IN OUR PRESIDENT (or whom we might try to elect as our next president); **OUR FAITH IS IN GOD ALONE.**

I will be honest and say that at this moment it looks like God may be saying very clearly to us American Christians, your confidence, your trust, your faith cannot be in your president or in your government. It must be in Me alone!

WHILE EVIL FLOURISHES IN OUR NATION, WHAT IS OUR ROLE AS AMERICAN CHRISTIANS?

- **PRAY** – We need to pray for ourselves, our families, our churches, our communities, our nation as we have never prayed before!
- **DO WHAT IS IN OUR POWER TO DO TO PROMOTE RIGHTEOUSNESS**
 - **Be good citizens without disobeying God.**
 - **Choose leaders who we believe will promote the most righteousness.**

I believe that we are still supposed to exercise our responsibility to vote.

Even if the choice is between the lesser of two evils.

There are people whom I respect that are telling Christians not to vote because to vote for either presidential candidate is to endorse evil.

I very respectfully disagree with that counsel.

Listen, if you don't vote, and the person who wins proves to be horrible and do horrible things, then you are just as responsible as those who voted for that candidate because you could have voted for the other one and did not!

Mark 12:17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ...

Did Jesus hold His followers responsible for the evil of Rome because they paid Roman taxes? No! He told them to pay their taxes.

A part of what we Americans owe to the democratic republic in which we live is participation in the voting process. We cannot have a democratic republic if people will not vote.

I plan to vote for the candidate that I believe holds out the most promise for

- **Protecting the life of the unborn**
- **Protecting religious liberty**
- **Protecting Biblical values in marriage and human sexuality**

There will be other righteous things that will probably make my list before November. I will pray and seek the counsel of God, and make the best judgment I can, but I will vote. I believe it is my responsibility before God to do what I can do to promote righteousness.

The other thing we can most definitely do to promote righteousness is to

- **Share the gospel.**

Doing this is even more powerful than voting. The gospel is the power of God to salvation. You change a life for eternity with the gospel. You can transform a person's whole worldview by leading them to faith in Christ.

There is nothing you can do that would be more productive in the transformation of the world and the promotion of righteousness over evil than sharing the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

And listen, **even while evil flourishes all around you, faith sustains the faithful!**

PRAYER – Lord evil overflows our land. We watch for You God; we wait upon You, Lord.

And we declare to You, "We trust in You."

We cry out to You for we acknowledge that apart from You we can do nothing.

We commit ourselves to obey You and to keep on keeping on in our obedience to You even through much waiting, even while evil flourishes around us.

God, may we not only be men and women of faith, but make us to be men and women who are faithful

- Faithful in prayer
- Faithful to do what You put in our power to do to oppose evil and promote righteousness.

And God we know You are ever faithful, and You will sustain the faith of the faithful.

In Jesus name, Amen.