

20.3.22 pm

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Date: 20 March 2022

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and warm welcome to the service this evening. Those who are here, good to see a good number again here this evening. And those who are watching online, it's good for us to come together to worship God.

We're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise. In Psalm 25, the first two stanzas of the Psalm, verses 1 to 3 as it's marked in English.

To thee I lift my soul, O Lord, I trust in thee. My God, let me not be ashamed nor foes triumph over me. Let none that wait on thee be put to shame at all.

But those that without cause transgress, let shame upon them fall. And these words, as we think about the book of Esther and the unfolding story, we see how they tie in to this plot line.

So let's sing these words to God's praise. Where the men see it to sing in Gaelic. Well, let's sing these words to God's praise. Thank you. Thank you.

[1 : 04] Here, here, I listen to his voice.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[3 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[6 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[8 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[13 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Amen.

[18 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[21 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[23 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[26 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 34] Thank you.

What do you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[34 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[37 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

And so, thank you.

[40 : 04] I need to do, thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

We can see you. They're not, such a symbol.

made you, you, this was, you, one, piece ofâm ■■■■■, this, and, you,, sweat, you, something, you, and, you, you, doing, you, and, you, your, you, you, you, because, you, God, you, you, you, you, your, own, you, you., top, you're, y--" anderen, you're, ont, you, you, guy, you, and, you, you■, you, know, irgendetwie, you, you, you, You, you're, you're, you.

wasn't the kind of prayer where the slightest buzz on your phone takes you away down a track that distracts us for prayer for the next half an hour. This was fervent, sincere, desperate prayer. So they prayed.

[43 : 29] They faced trouble, they prayed. And there was repentance in their prayer, there was a reality in their prayer. And as we watch them, we should learn.

We learn ourselves. We're taught how we're to pray, especially when we hit trouble. Sometimes the trouble that we face is unrelated to sin.

Think about Job. There's a whole book there that makes clear to us that Job, although he encountered the most desperate trouble. It wasn't because of sin.

It was actually because of his righteousness. So we can never look at somebody and say, you're having a hard time. Well, what have you done? Sometimes the trouble that we face is absolutely nothing to do with sin.

But sometimes trouble can be sin-related. We can swing to the other extreme. And sometimes never stop to think, well, what is God saying to me when I hit trouble?

[44 : 34] Sometimes when we're spiritually drifting, sometimes when we're so deep in the world that we can't find time to open God's word, we have no heart or mind to actually draw near to him in prayer.

The only way he can reach us is in providence. And so sometimes God gets our attention through even difficult circumstances.

And when we face that, we should ask the Lord to search our hearts. And when we see sin, we're to repent.

And when we pray, whatever is going on in our lives, whether we're going through hard times or whether things are relatively easy, when we pray, it should be real.

It should be intense. We are to remember as we pray. And our prayer would be transformed if we remembered every time that we open our mouths and every time that we bend our knee, that we have an audience with the King of Kings.

[45 : 48] He's listening. So as we pray, we are to engage in prayer with all our hearts.

So the first thing we see as they respond to this trouble is that they prayed. And the second thing we see as we continue through the chapter is they plan.

As we step through the verses, we see that God's people, having first spoken to God, they now begin to speak to each other.

We often get that order wrong. You know, we speak to everybody else first. We're on the phone.

We're messaging. We're seeking counsel here, there and everywhere. We're talking to everyone in our experience before we actually get on our knees and speak to God.

Well, that's the wrong order and we see that here. They speak first to God and then they speak to each other and they begin to plan. There's action now in terms of the practicalities of the situation.

[46 : 55] Kenny Stewart, the minister in Glasgow says, until we pray, there is nothing we can do. But once you pray, there is everything to do.

And that's what we see here. There's activity and there's planning in the next few verses. Stage one of the plan is to alert Esther, the queen, to the problem.

Remember, Esther's locked away in the palace. She is in this luxurious prison. She has no Wi-Fi connection. She has no iPhone.

She has no connection with the outside world. She doesn't know what's going on. So the news of this edict, this order wouldn't have reached her. But as Mordecai and as the other Jews go out onto the streets and they start to weep and pray publicly, the news would soon get to Esther that all was not well.

That's what happened. In verse 4, we're told Esther's maids and eunuchs came in, having been out there on the street. and they told her about Mordecai and she was in great distress.

[48 : 08] She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. So Esther, when she hears of Mordecai's state, her first instinct is to protect and calm down Mordecai.

You know, this public display of attention was going to draw attention to Mordecai. People would start to see his nationality, that he's a Jew. People would start to realise that he has faith and that may get Mordecai into a whole lot of trouble.

So she sends a new outfit for Mordecai to put on, which was a bit like putting a wee plaster over a wound that needs a thousand stitches.

And Mordecai, when he receives this new outfit, he sends it straight back. He won't take it.

Which was another indication to Esther that something serious was wrong. I think there's a lesson there for us just to note in passing.

[49 : 15] We can be very quick to act like Esther. When people are in distress, we're very quick sometimes just to say, you know, it's okay, don't worry.

Just don't give it a thought. Just think about something else. You know, change your clothes, wash your face, take a walk, don't cry, just forget about it.

But sometimes that's not the right thing to do. Sometimes the right thing to do is to cry and lament and be sad as they were here.

Situation was serious. This was not the time for God's people to change their outfit and feel better. They needed to weep. And Esther is beginning to understand that as she receives this outfit from Mordecai back to the palace.

And Esther now has to send a message out to Mordecai to find out what's going on. So verse 5, then Esther summoned Hathath, one of the king's eunuchs, assigned to attend her and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

[50 : 31] So Hathath went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Let's hit pause there just for a second. I wonder if I was to have asked the question this morning or even at 5 o'clock this afternoon.

Tell me about Hathath. You know these Bible trivia quizzes. You know, tell me about Hathath. What do we know about Hathath? I would doubt if anybody would have been able to give much of an answer when it came to a question about Hathath.

I think most of us would have said, you know, who is he? We don't know his name. To be honest, I don't know if I'm pronouncing his name right. But God knew his name.

And God the Holy Spirit made sure that his name was recorded. Hathath's job here was crucial. We see that. He needs to go out of the palace, which may have been risky.

He needs to find Mordecai. Remember, Mordecai now is a marked man. Haman, the prime minister, has his sights on him. And Hathath, he needs to find out the truth.

[51 : 50] He needs to find out the extent of the bad news about the danger that God's people were in. And then he needs to take that report and carry it back to Esther. So on the one hand, Hathath's job was quite straightforward.

He was just a messenger. But his job was absolutely crucial. He was one of the links in the chain that led to the salvation of God's people just a little down the line.

And we're speaking to the commentator. He says this. He says, I doubt that Hathath realized what an important part he was playing in God's plan to defeat Haman and save the Jews.

And then he follows up by saying this. So often in the work of the Lord, he uses obscure people to accomplish important tasks. What was the name, asks we, or the lad who gave Jesus his loaves and fishes?

Who were the men who rescued Paul by lifting him over that Damascus wall in a basket? What was the name of the little servant girl who told Naaman to go and see the prophet?

[52 : 58] We don't know. But God used these people to accomplish his purposes. As great doors can swing upon small hinges, so great events can turn upon the deeds of small and sometimes anonymous people.

So the application is to be a hathoth. Be available, be willing to be a messenger of God, be willing to be a link in the chain that God may use to save his people.

Let's carry on verse 7. Mordecai told him everything that happened to him, including the, this is Mordecai told Hathath, everything that happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for the annihilation which had been published in Susa to show to Esther and explain it to her and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Hathath went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. And if you put yourself in the shoes of Hathath just for a minute, he must have been thinking, what on earth am I involved in here?

[54 : 33] You know, I went out with a fairly straightforward message. I thought I was just going to have to deliver a message but what am I in the middle of here? I mean, he can see, surely, that he is in the middle of something serious.

Hathath was probably thinking, what's going to happen if I'm found out to be an agent to the Jews? What's going to happen if Xerxes and Haman discover that I've been leaking information to do with

this edict and I might be used to undermine it?

I mean, this was serious stuff. This was life and death stuff. But he didn't shrink back. He's faithful in passing on the message from Mordecai to Esther.

And now he's got another message to pass back in reply. Look at verse 10 and 11. Esther, there's a bit of ping pong here. The message is going back and forth.

They didn't have a mobile phone. They couldn't text in three seconds. Then she, Esther, instructed him to say to Mordecai, all the king's officials and all the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law, that he be put to death.

[55 : 55] The only exception to this is for the king to extend the golden scepter to him and spare his life. For 30 days, says Esther, 30 days has passed since I was called to go into the king.

There was a time when the king seemed to be absolutely infatuated with Esther but it seems that just now is not that time. And Esther is worried.

Some say that Esther's being selfish here. Some of the commentators say she's just thinking about number one. She's just thinking about the danger that she's in.

She's just thinking about saving her own skin. She's not thinking about the 15 million Jews that could be affected. We don't know that.

I think that's harsh personally. I wonder if Esther's just counting the cost here. She's in a position where she may be able on behalf of her people to plead for mercy.

[57 : 10] She's at a juncture where she may on behalf of her people be able to seek salvation but she recognizes she's not flavor of the month with the king.

So this is risky. This king can be rash. He can be unpredictable. We saw that with Vashti. She says no to him once and she's gone.

One historian tells a story about Xerxes about Xerxes and it's a story where his army are marching from one place to the other.

I can't remember where they were marching from and to. But on route in this army's march they were to cross two bridges. So up ahead in the route that was selected there was two bridges that they were due to cross but before the army arrived at the bridges the area was hit by a storm and such was the strength of the storm that the two bridges were swept away by the waters and the army was held back and it says and I'm just reading here from the article Xerxes was enraged and had those responsible for building the bridges beheaded.

He's then said that I've thrown fetters into the strait given it three hundred whiplashes and branded it with red hot irons as the soldiers shouted at the water.

[58 : 44] So this is the kind of man we're dealing with. So furious is he when he doesn't get his own way that he decides he's going to whip the sea. He's not a stable man.

And so Esther is in a very risky situation as she's been asked to make her approach and so she tells that to Mordecai. she tells Mordecai this is this is far from straightforward.

My neck is on the line here. This is risky. I wonder when you and I last took a risk for God.

You know Esther's weighing that up just now. she recognizes the risk the potential cost here. When did you and I last take a risk for God?

You know we're not living in a Xerxes culture. We're not going to lose our heads for speaking about Jesus but we can lose our reputation. We can lose our credibility.

[59 : 56] We can lose friends. It can be risky to share faith. So when do we last take a risk for Jesus sake?

That's the Esther issue that she's wrestling with at this point. The stakes are high for her. And so she reports back to Mordecai verse 12.

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai he sent back this answer. Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place but you and your father's family will perish.

And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this. And that's the key verse in the book I think.

If I was to ask the question beforehand tell me a verse from Esther that would be the worst would go to. Who knows but that you Esther have come to royal position for such a time as this.

[61 : 17] Esther here is recognised we recognise Esther as the woman that God put in a particular place at a particular time to do this particular job.

And Esther if she was willing that's what she's wrestling with if she was willing God was going to use her to bring salvation to her people.

What would have happened if she bottled it? What would have happened if Esther just said no it's just too high a risk? Well Mordecai actually gives the answer to that and he says to Esther Esther if you remain silent if you hide in the palace Esther then God will still save his people but he'll save his people through someone else some other way but maybe Esther says Mordecai maybe God's plan is to use you you know as we look around in the place that God has put us in terms of our family in terms of our friends in terms of this place as we think about the time that we're living in the circumstances that we face none of it's a coincidence and you know in the circumstances that we're in at the time that we're living in one of the lessons from the book of

Esther is that if we are God's people he wants to use us it's a great privilege God doesn't need us but he gives us the opportunity to be used in his salvation story so Esther has that opportunity now so what would she do she's prayed there's a plan that's coming together and the final thing is that she proceeds then Esther verse 15 said sent a supply to Mordecai go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me do not eat or drink for three days night or day

I and my maids will fast as you do and I think it's worth noting there just before we move on that you know the people around Esther her maids they now know she's one of God's people they might not have known in the past but they they now know that she's one of God's people Esther at some point has shared her her faith with them and Esther has used the position and the influence that she has to encourage them to look to the God that she worships because Esther says not just I will pray but she says my people these people who are with me my maids they will pray as well they'll fast as I do and when this is done says Esther verse 16 I will go to the king even though it's against the law and if I perish I perish so Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions and so as we finish we can see

[65 : 34] Esther is going forward she's proceeding and in this section we we see the same pattern again don't we she prays if she calls for corporate prayer then she plans she has this plan to go to the king even though it was against the law even though it may cost her her life and now Esther and Mordecai are ready to proceed so what will happen next well if you haven't read the book of Esther you're going to have to wait for that we'll find out in due course what will happen next but just a closing thought think about this Esther is pointing us here to Jesus we see we see previews of Jesus in this story you know

Esther saw here at this juncture she may have to lay down her life in seeking to save her people but Jesus knew before he came that he definitely would have to lay down his life to save us but he did it in accordance with the plan of God he came he lived he died he proceeded to the cross for us so let's look to him let's trust in him and we'll pray our heavenly father we thank you for this this story this account of what happened in history many many years ago and we see the complexity and the wonder of your plan to save your people when all looked lost when it looked absolutely hopeless we see the wonder of how you used even

Esther and Mordecai and even Hathath to bring your salvation plan into action and we know that this plan is a plan which didn't stop with Esther but it carried on all the way to Jesus he is the one who would be born as the king of the Jews from the line of the Jews and we thank you that Jesus did come into this world we thank you for the eternal salvation plan of God we thank you that Jesus laid down his life in order that we could be saved in order that we would not perish but that if we believed in him we would have eternal life so help us to look to Jesus help us to trust in Jesus and help us as Esther did to serve you Lord in the places and the situations that you put us in day by day in our lives and we ask all this in

Jesus name Amen we will sing to finish hymn 680 and we see the words on the screen my times are in thy hand my God I wish them there my life my friends my soul I leave entirely to thy care my times are in thy hand my God I wish them there my life my friends my soul my life my life entirely entirely to thy care my times are in thy hand whatever they may be pleasing or painful dark or bright as best may seem to thee my times are in thy hand why should

I doubt or fear my father's hand will never cause his child a needless year my times are in thy hand Jesus the crucified those hands my cruel sins and fears are now my guard and guide my times are in thy hand I will always trust in thee and after death at thy right hand I shall forever be and now

may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God
the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore
[72 : 03] Amen