

3.4.22 pm

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Date: 03 April 2022

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening, those who are here and those who are still online. We're going to begin this time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise from Psalm 118, Psalm 118, the psalm that we thought a little about this morning as we looked at the Palm Sunday passage in Luke chapter 19.

Psalm 118, we'll sing the first three stanzas, verses 1 to 5 in Gaelic. Praise the Lord for he is good, his mercy lasteth ever.

Let those of Israel now say his mercy faileth never. Now let the house of Aaron say his mercy lasteth ever. Let those that fear the Lord now say his mercy faileth never.

I in distress called on the Lord, the Lord did answer me. He in a large place stood me set from trouble, made me free. These three stanzas to God's praise.

And after we've sung, Donald McSween will lead us in prayer in Gaelic, please. his and his fMUSIC for his mercy faileth later.

[1 : 15] He is not a selenior straighter. individuals have ye. The Lord is on the Weird, Duke. That was a syringe. The Lord is on the name. He is on the own.

The Lord is on the for climbing. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[3 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[6 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[8 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[11 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[13 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[16 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[18 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Esther.

[21 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[23 : 31] Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[26 : 01] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[28 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

You will remember.

Thank you.

[34 : 31] Thank you.

Thank you.

do much more than we could ever have imagined. So in the next few minutes we've got four points and the first point is patience. We're going to need patience and Esther needed patience as she stepped forward. The second point is a preview. We're going to see a preview of something that's to come later in scripture and then we see Esther step forward. The king keeps asking her, what's your petition? What is it you want Esther? And she has to share that and the story at the end of chapter five finishes with this massive problem. So that gives us the map for the next few minutes. So first of all we have the point patience. And when we're in trouble one of the things that we find hardest to do is be patient. You know when we have a problem of whatever nature we want that problem fixed. Whether it's an issue of our health, whether it's an issue of finance, whether it's some relational problem. When we have this problem and when we're aware that there's something that's troubling us, we just want the problem fixed and we want it fixed now. We don't have to, we don't want to have to wait in a telephone queue to speak to someone who can help us. We don't want to have to wait for an appointment to see somebody who can intervene. We don't want to have to wait for a part to come into stock in order for our problem to be fixed. We want our problem dealt with whatever it is. We want it dealt with now.

But very often we have to have patience. And think about Esther. Her problem is no small problem. She and all her people are under the threat of death.

In fact it's more than a threat. It's an edict that says they will die on this particular date in just a few months time.

[38 : 25] It's a massive problem. But in dealing with this problem she's going to need patience. And she shows patience in her actions and in her reactions.

And we as we read this story and go through this chapter chapter 5 we need patience as we follow the plot through. Because as we finish in chapter 4 then if we're following the story we're in a rush to know what's happening next.

And the challenge has gone out to Esther to speak up on behalf of her people. Mordecai has said to Esther very squarely who knows Esther but maybe you're in this position as queen for such a time as this.

Esther says chapter 4 verse 14 and Esther realises this and she is apprehensive about the weight that's been put on her.

And after perhaps some period of wrestling in verse 16 of chapter 4 she says to Mordecai okay I see the problem I understand the gravity of it I'll go to the king.

[39 : 38] I'll risk my life. I'll break the law. This is a mad idea really in a common sense point of view but she says I'll do it and if I perish I perish.

So at the end of chapter 4 there's high drama. These are the words that are reverberating. Esther's saying if I die doing this I'm willing to die.

And then as we move into chapter 5 we want to know what's going to happen next. But as chapter 5 begins things kind of frustratingly slow down.

Look at verse 1 where we can even sense in the beginning of the chapter the pace of everything has kind of got frustratingly slow.

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes she gets dressed and she stood in the inner court of the palace in front of the king's hall.

[40 : 51] The king was sitting on his royal throne as he always did. In the hall facing the entrance.

We're kind of reading through this going well there's a lot of detail in here and this is not what I want to know. I'm not very interested about the king's robes. I'm not very interested about the inner courts and the outer courts and the king's hall and the royal throne and the entrance.

We just want to say to the writer just tell us what happened. What's happened to Esther? Esther? Are God's people safe or are they not safe?

Is Esther going to keep her head or is she going to lose it? What's going to happen? And we're going to get answers as the chapter unfolds but we need patience before we get to these answers and that's often the case.

You know it seems as chapter 5 begins here that our God was not in a rush for Esther to act. She's come to the point of action.

[42 : 07] There's nothing panicked about this. There's nothing fraught and panicky about this that there's composure.

God is not in a rush. He's never in a rush. It's not that God is losing sight of the urgency and the gravity of the situation.

It's not as if God has taken his eye off the clock and the details that were involved in this plot line. He's well aware of all the timings and all the details and we're going to see that as the story unfolds.

He will act and he will ensure that everything that needs to happen will happen at exactly the right time. But Esther and Mordecai and we as we read this story are going to have to be patient.

And that's a lesson that we're taught all the way through the Bible. In the New Testament also it's a lesson that we often hear. Think of Lazarus in John chapter 11.

[43 : 21] I think John Lachey spoke about this a couple of weeks ago. Think about Lazarus. The message goes to Jesus about Lazarus his friend. The one that you love Jesus is sick.

Come quickly. It's the implication. But what does Jesus do? He delays. Patience was required. or think about the daughter of Jairus in Mark chapter 5.

This little girl. She's dying. And her father pleads for Jesus to come and to come quickly.

But Jesus delays. Patience was required. But through these delays and in the waiting we actually learn that Jesus is more powerful and he is more in control than we ever realized.

You think about these New Testament accounts. Those who eyewitnessed what Jesus was doing realized in the delays that not only was Jesus able to heal was sick when he determined to.

[44 : 44] But he was able to raise the dead. And he is still praise the Lord able to raise the dead.

patience is the first point. The second point is a preview.

We think about a preview. Sometimes we'll be given a two minute preview of a film that's coming out in six weeks time. There's various previews that we see in the book of Esther and I think we're given a preview of something that's to come as we look at verse one.

I mean when you look at verse one and how the story begins or the chapter begins there's the phrase on which the verse begins and it's that phrase on the third day.

That's how this begins. On the third day. All seems to be quiet. In spite of the drama, in spite of the urgency of the situation, in spite of all that seems so awful that's happening in the background, nothing much is happening it would seem until the third day.

[46 : 09] We ask the question why the third day and if we step back a verse or two to chapter four, verse 16, we are reminded of the fact that there was prayer and there was fasting.

that Esther had requested and was taking part in until the third day. This was now the third day. And so after prayer must come action.

And so Esther steps out and she puts on her royal robes. She is in this position for such a time as this. she is the queen. So she dresses as the queen.

And she stands before King Xerxes. And Xerxes sits in that position of authority on the royal throne. And historians tell us, although we don't have it in the text here, that Xerxes had a guard immediately behind him by his throne with a huge axe.

And anybody that approached the throne of Xerxes without having been summoned, would lose their head if they came too close.

[47 : 24] Unless the golden scepter went forth. So you could say this was the moment that all of Esther's life had been building towards as she steps forward.

So what would happen next? verse 2 says, when he, that Xerxes, saw Queen Esther standing in the court.

I don't think Esther is called Queen Esther, certainly by Xerxes, until this point. He's never seen her in this way before. But it seems that in this moment, something has changed.

when he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand.

So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. And as we read through this, we can take a breath just for a moment.

[48 : 30] You could say stage one is completed of this mission. Esther, who was realistically fearing for her life as she approaches this unpredictable king.

She survived. And in terms of the bigger picture, God's people, the Jews, who stood condemned to death through the law, through these edicts, this is the first indication that there may be hope ahead.

there may be life. And when did the first sign of life come? On the third day.

On the third day. And I wonder, is that ringing any bells for us? Is that causing our minds to race forward? Are we thinking about anything that's to come in Scripture?

Well, I think we should be. Because I think what we're given here is another preview of the greater salvation that was to come to God's people, not through Esther, but you could say through Easter, through Jesus.

[49 : 54] Because we, in that spiritual sense, we, because of our sins, stood condemned to death. The wages of sin are death. And we couldn't save ourselves.

Not through our good works, not through our religion, but Jesus. The Savior. The one whom Esther has been pointing us forward to.

Jesus, he lived that sinless life for us. He died for us, that sinner's death. And on the third day, he rose.

showing that life and salvation was secured for all who believe in him. So even deep in this Old Testament story of Esther, we see a preview of the Easter story that we're approaching.

We see a preview of the cross and the resurrection. salvation and the eternal life that's offered to those who believe in Jesus.

[51 : 09] So there's patience required as we see God at work. And sometimes as we don't see God at work, but he's still at work. And there's a preview of the salvation that was to come, not just through Esther, but through Jesus.

And the third thing here is the petition. And we'll move just quickly through the text here, through the verses, as we follow the story through.

We can imagine Xerxes, he's allowed Esther to live. But he's going to be curious to know what on earth has caused Esther to behave in this way.

What could be so important that Esther would take her life on her hands and approach me, the king, without permission, knowing the potential consequences of that?

What's going on with Esther? So Xerxes, he comes out and he asks her, he invites her to bring her petition. What's on your mind, Esther?

[52 : 16] The king asked, verse 3, what is it, Queen Esther? What is your request, even up to half the kingdom? It will be given you. He's saying to her, I'm going to look favourably on your petition.

Whatever it is that's troubling you, don't worry about this, I'll deal with this. And so Esther responds in verse 4, if it pleases the king, replied Esther, let the king together with Haman come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.

She's thought this through. Notice she doesn't say, hang on a second, I've got to go home, I've got to get a banquet prepared. She has this banquet already prepared. She has a plan here. She's prayed, she's planned, she's acting.

Bring Haman at once, the king said, verse 5, so that we may do what Esther asks. And Esther knows how to play the king. She knows this king is a man who loves a party, as does Haman.

So rather than coming straight out with her petition, which clearly she didn't intend to do, she says, come to the banquet. I've prepared for you. She's wise. So the king, verse 5, and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.

[53 : 33] As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, now what is your petition? And it will be given you. What is your request?

Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted. Esther replied, verse 7, my petition and my request is this. You can kind of feel the tension building.

And perhaps the frustration in Xerxes, come on, what is it? Let's hear, what is it that you're asking for? There's more tension here than there is in the kind of announcement of the window of the X factor.

Who's it going to be? What's it going to happen here? And Esther seems to just come to the brink of sharing the petition and then she steps back.

If the king, verse 8, regards me with favour and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet.

[54 : 35] I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question. So why does Esther hesitate? Well, we don't know. It might be fear.

It might just be that in that moment she had that sense from God, the Holy Spirit, just no more. You've come far enough. Step back for a moment.

We don't know what's causing Esther to hesitate. But what we do know is that the longer she leaves this, the more the king realises the importance of this petition that's coming.

So Esther, as she builds up to asking this question, she has the full attention of the king. He now realises this is a massive thing that Esther's going to bring, whatever it is.

is a thing that is to be. But it strikes me as I think about the praises that we sang, how thankful we should be that we don't have to approach the king of kings in the same manner that Esther has to approach Xerxes.

[56 : 01] She's treading on eggshells. She is dealing with an unpredictable king. She has a fear of rejection. There is a fear, a realistic fear that she will be dismissed with violence.

but we have no such fear as we come in prayer to the king of kings as we sang a moment ago before the throne of God above I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love.

Whoever lives and pleads for me. We should never approach the throne of God with a casual irreverence.

We should always approach the throne of God with that sense of awe and right godly fear. But because of Jesus, because of our great high priest, we come as those who can have confidence, we come as children of God, that our loving father, to bring our petitions.

We should thank God for that. the petition and the final thing here is the problem. Haman, verse 9, went out that day happy and in high spirits.

[57 : 46] He's had banquet number one, his belly is full, his head is probably spinning with wine, and he's staggering out of this banquet and he's in high spirits, literally.

But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

I think just as we pass on this point, we should just notice that Mordecai, he's getting on with life. It's a point that we might easily overlook, but Mordecai, he's back at the king's gate, he's back in the office, he's getting on with life.

Yes, the edict is still in place, yes, he and his people still face a death sentence, yes, things are very tense, there is clear and present danger that they're very aware of, but Mordecai, he's prayed, he has done what he can, and now it seems that he's taken the problem, he's leaving it in God's hands.

He's just getting on with life. He's not wringing his hands and whimpering and whining and saying, I can't go out, I can't do anything, I must stay.

[59 : 09] He's not focused on himself, and absolutely fixated with this problem, he's taken it to the Lord in prayer, and now he's just getting on with life.

There's invoices to check, there's accounts to clear, so he's just getting on with things. There's a great example there, I think.

Malcolm McLean says, I think it's fair to say that the time of prayer has given to Mordecai a sense of peace about the destiny of his people.

If he was a prophet, as can be deduced from the previous chapter, he could have received special assurance from God, even if he had not, though, it is still the case that the response to prayer should be peace, because the matter has been placed in God's hand.

It's very easy to take our burdens and hand them over to God in prayer, and then five minutes later to take them back and be absolutely immobilized because we're still carrying the things.

[60 : 21] Mordecai doesn't do that. I think it's important for us to note that. He's there at the king's gate, but when Haman sees him, he's absolutely maddened by him.

But Mordecai, he's protected in the meantime. Haman, verse 10, restrained himself and went home. And calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, he then has this boasting party.

And you can read in verse 11 to verse 14, my time's gone about this boasting party. It must have been the most boring evening on the earth for all his friends.

Notice his friends aren't at the house waiting for him to have an enjoyable evening with Haman. He has to actually summon them and say, come round to the house. I've got all these things to boast about.

He has to make sure his wife is in the room because he's got all these things to boast about. His ego has to be massaged. And so he in this state of being crazed with pride, he rehearses all this to his friends and to his wife.

[61 : 33] He tells them about his vast wealth and his many sons, as if his wife needs to know how many sons he's got. He knows. His elevated position and the fact that he alone has this exclusive invitation to dine with the royals.

He says, all this is my portion. But he says, it means nothing to me as long as I see that Jew, as long as I see that man of God.

who's not groveling in front of me. He just has to see one glimpse of Mordecai. And he may as well have nothing because all the riches and all the status and all the reputational value that he has is meaningless because he lacks this one thing.

Mordecai won't bow. It's an illustration of what Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 6. 6. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

But the fact is, if we have everything in the world but not godliness, there's no contentment. And Haman shows us that.

[62 : 59] He cannot bear to see Mordecai disrespect him. And he can't wait any more months to have this Mordecai killed. It's got to be done now.

And so his wife, who seems to be a charming lady, who's probably sick of all the moaning, says, I've got an idea for you, Haman.

she doesn't say take two paracetamols to relieve the stress that's driving you mad. She says, have a gallows built. Here's an idea.

Let's have a 75-foot gallows built. Let's execute the man. And then that will calm you down.

We'll all get some peace. And you can have a nice dinner tomorrow night knowing that he's impaled in a 75-foot gallows. So that's where the chapter ends.

[64 : 04] This plan is in place now, whereby Mordecai will be hung. There's a huge problem that this chapter finishes on.

You know, Esther may have a plan to save her people. She may have this intention to bring a petition to the king, but it looks like her plan and her petition will not be enough to save Mordecai because he's about to hang.

So we finish with what looks like an insurmountable problem for Esther, even though she doesn't know it yet. And the clock is ticking.

Time is running out for Mordecai. And you know, very often this is how God works. He allows us to face what sometimes seems to be impossible problems.

And yet through the problems that the Lord sometimes allows to come into our lives, he shows us his vast power.

[65 : 34] You know, very often God will take us to the wire to show us that we can trust him. You know, that's how the muscle of faith grows. Abraham, think about Abraham.

He had to leave his father's house, his home, not knowing where he was going before God showed him where he was going. He didn't get the map before he left the house.

He had to leave the house before he got the map. Or think about Moses. He had to step forward and get his feet wet before the Red Sea parted.

Or think about Gideon. He had to send all these thousands and thousands of soldiers home until it was just a tiny little army.

before God's power and God's victory would be known. Or think about the disciples. They had to get in the boat and get thrown around in the storm before they saw Jesus still see.

[66 : 56] Or think about the disciples on Good Friday. they had to watch Jesus die at a distance before they would understand that he had secured eternal life.

God's and this is so often God's way. He takes us to the point where it looks to be impossible.

Our problems look to be insurmountable before he shows us time and time again that what is impossible with man is possible.

in fact it's easy with God. And we're going to see that as the story continues. We'll pray.

Heavenly Father we ask that you would help us as we think on this story as we consider this record of what you did in history.

[68 : 08] Help us we pray to have our faith increased as we consider all that you have done and are doing for us.

Forgive us when our faith grows weak. Forgive us when we stress and when we fret and when we try to take things into our own hearts. Help us we pray to trust you.

And help us we pray to worship you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. We'll sing to conclude Psalm 118 again and we'll sing from verse 6 to verse 14.

The mighty Lord is on my side. I will not be afraid. For anything that man can do I shall not be dismayed. Down to the end of verse 14. I shall stand to sing.

The mighty Lord is on my side.

[69 : 15] I will not be afraid. For anything that man can do I shall not be dismayed.

The Lord does take my part with them but help to succor me.

Therefore on those that do we hate I my desire shall cease.

Better it is to trust in God than trusting man's defense.

Better to trust in God than me. Princess our confidence.

[70 : 32] The nations joining all in one did compass me about.

But in the Lord's most holy name I shall them all root out.

They compass me about I say they compass me about.

But they question me about I shall them all root out.

Like peace they compass me about like unto sorts that claim they question are for them shall lie destroy in God's own name.

[71 : 58] The soul has trust that I might fall but my Lord help let me God my salvation is become my strength and song is he and I 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.