



lyona bible church

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS – MAY 30, 2010

Announcements – Please read these to your group!

Please check your bulletin and the website (www.lyona.org) each week for additional information.

- **THEOS:** A new semester will be starting Sunday, June 13 beginning at 9am. Two courses are being offered: *Forgotten God* (Holy Spirit study) and *Heart Revolution* (Parables). We encourage those who will be sporadic during the summer to attend *Heart Revolution*. Sign-up at the Information Desk!
- **Life Groups:** Our Life Groups are open to new couples and singles. So invite away!

Risking It All: Esther 4

Recap:

As we make our way to chapter 4 in Esther, we find that Mordecai and the thousands of Jews in Persia are mourning the news of the genocide decree. Now a cause has been birthed. Mordecai looks to Esther for help in the cause to overturn the decree and to save their people. Over much dialogue, Esther is willing to lose her life in order to gain life for her people. We are challenged to sacrificially commit to a cause.

Questions:

1. What was the most interesting idea or principle about this Sunday's message?
2. What is a cause? Do you have any causes?
3. Could you relate with the speaker and his experience with 9/11? Why do some rally around causes and others seem that they don't care?
4. Have someone read Esther 4:1-3. Why was Mordecai's expression of mourning (tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth and ashes) so extreme? Was it possible that he knew that he was the reason for the genocide decree?
5. Have someone read Esther 4:4-11. What was Esther's response to Mordecai? Why was his response risky?
6. Have someone read Esther 4:12-17. What did Mordecai remind Esther of? What was Esther's final decision? What are the implications of her commanding a 3-day fast from her and her people?
7. Just like Esther we are faced with the decision to either defend or deny causes in our lives. When it comes to the cause of the Church, what is to be your response?
8. Do you, after hearing the sermon this Sunday, need to confess anything or repent of anything? What in your life needs to change?

Prayer Requests

A place to write out your groups' prayer requests

SERMON NOTES

Each header with sub-points is a slide used in Sunday morning's PowerPoint presentation.

Text: Esther 4

Speaker: Jeff Geyer

A cause. There are many causes out there to choose from. It is never hard to find a cause. Just Google a cause and you will find information with how to support it. So that we are on the same page let me define a cause. A cause is a movement started and continued from a deep commitment to either advocate or defend a person or thing. Regardless of your cause, it requires a deep commitment on your part.

I remember my first semester of college. It was a semester that I would never forget. I can remember starting my second week of classes by walking over to the student center to check my mail. Over checking my empty mailbox, I headed to my class. I also had to pick the desk closest to the door, so I was normally the first to the classroom. Our class started the same exact way like it did the last week: prayer, lesson plan, break, and finish up the lesson plan. When it came to break, I couldn't wait to get out so that I could grab some Skittles, something that I did for the last week or so.

But Skittles were the last things on my mind as I saw one of the most despicable acts of depravity on the TV. I lost my appetite to feelings of anger when I saw the news break of the plane crashing into the World Trade Center. I could not believe what I was watching. It broke my heart to imagine the people being killed for a cause. Immediately, I felt that I needed to be part of something to defend my country.

I believe the response to these horrific acts was so great because they were personal and tangible. Millions of Americans rallied with deep commitment behind the cause to defend their country. Those Americans were willing to lose everything to gain everything for their cause. They understood what kind of commitment was needed to start and continue the cause. The kind of commitment need for any cause is sacrifice. We have to be okay with losing something to defend or advocate our cause.

There are many causes just like 9/11 that try to redeem the depravity in human acts of violence. Fighting against terrorism, protecting people from genocide, and the war against human trafficking are causes that defend the victims. There are so many causes that have us willing to make deep commitments.

Causes are not just for those acts of violence. Fighting cancer, getting clean water to impoverished African nations and trying to find the cure for so many diseases are popular causes in our society. A cause that Jenny has been involved in over the years is Locks of Love. This cause helps those who have lost their hair through chemo in their fight against cancer have the opportunity to wear wigs made of the hair donated by people. This cause is very personal and tangible for Jenny after her aunt died of cancer. So she grows out her hair long enough so she can donate the 8" necessary for donation. She is committed to this cause because of the impact that cancer has had on her family.

Many of us have found something to rally around because of what it means to us. Whether it has been because of a personal connection to the cause or just because we want to be the hero, it does not take long to find a cause. We know the commitment that these causes require of us and we embrace the commitment. We are

willing to do anything to help this cause change the lives of people. We know the impact that it can have and we are willing to do anything to make that happen.

Some of us are not behind any cause because we know that it will cost us something. A something that we are not sure we want to lose. We are not willing to sacrifice anything. We know how much commitment these causes require and we are not convinced. We are not convinced with how many lives can be changed with these causes. We enjoy the comfort of our life too much.

Our kids have impacted some of us. Our kid goes off to school and while by themselves, they find a cause that they are behind. So the next time they call you (or text), they are emphatically telling you about the need to be green. They are telling you to trade in your F-350 for a Prius so that we can live for an additional 5 years. They have rallied around this cause to defend the environment.

Others of us have tried to impact of kids. We take our kids to the polls to teach them to vote for our party. So when our kid turns 18 and has the opportunity to vote for the first time, they want to try another party because it is different and new. Now dinners are looking no different than a good debate on C-SPAN.

Some of us work for a company that pushes their cause on us. We go to work and we are being challenged to join the cause of the company. We believe in the cause but we are not sure if they are going about the right way. We are unsure of the direction of the company, so we are not willing to commit to it.

Our spouse has impacted some of us. Your husband comes home and tells you that he found a guy on the radio that preaches about living debt-free. So you do not like where this going and you tell your husband that the guy is just trying to make a buck. But your husband persists and persists that this guy is for real and your husband has bought-in to this philosophy.

Just as these causes mean something to those close to us, there was a queen who had to make a commitment to join a cause or die avoiding one. We will be picking up with the story of Esther in chapter 4.

¹When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

This is definitely a cultural custom that we are not familiar with. I have yet to see someone take off his or her clothes and put on a coarse potato sack, rub ashes on their face, go down to the courthouse, and starting yelling and crying. Could you imagine the stares and the mocking?

Even living in the Persian capital, Persians would have found this odd. Needless to say Jews would react to horrific news in this way. Tearing one's clothes was a symbol of the inward anguish the mourner is feeling. Undoubtedly, it is a violent expression of emotional pain. Sackcloth was a rough cloth made of goat hair or flax, which was worn in place of regular everyday clothes. Ashes represented grief and repentance. All of this was an outward sign to others that the person is suffering great inner turmoil.

²He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

Mordecai could be remorseful because his identity is out in the open. However it seems likely that Mordecai is remorseful and expressing the guilt he has from covering up the reason why he did not respect Haman. It seems that Mordecai never had a problem with bowing to those in authority over him until Haman's promotion. There must have been a personal issue that Mordecai had with Haman, which could be founded in the lineage of both men. Needless to say, Mordecai tells his co-workers that he doesn't respect Haman because he is a Jew. So after Haman hears this, he gets the king to sign the decree to genocide the Jews within the Persian Empire.

Mordecai is feeling at fault with the issue of the decree. He is solely at fault with putting the entire Jewish nation at risk of becoming extinct. With being overcome with guilt, he begins to scramble. He made a public appeal in opposition of the edict purposefully in the king's gate to get the attention of Queen Esther, his adoptive daughter. She was the only who could help him.

³And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Not only Mordecai but also Jews from the 127 provinces lost their appetite and began to mourn with sackcloth and ashes. Their first response was to fast, which includes prayer. Isn't it ironic that even though we do not practice expressing our mourning like the Jews, we immediately begin to pray when faced with a terrible fate?

⁴When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Esther, unfamiliar with the decree, was deeply distressed with Mordecai's behavior. She wanted to clothe Mordecai so he could either resume his work (as an accountant) or fit him to talk with her about the reasoning behind his public expression. It customary in the Persian Empire that in order to enter the king's gate one needed to dress appropriately. It seems that Mordecai rejected the offer from Esther to continue show his public disapproval of the decree. If this alludes and the previous three verses to anything it is Mordecai's pride.

⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. ⁹And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

Since Esther was unable to meet with Mordecai, she uses the eunuch, who was assigned to her, as an informant. She wanted to know what was the purpose of Mordecai's reaction. She was concerned about Mordecai because his reaction and behavior was not normal. Nothing like this happened in the 5 years of her reign. This perhaps may have been the first time she was exposed firsthand to sackcloth and ashes.

Hathach goes out to meet with Mordecai, who is in the open square of the king's gate, and find out the information Esther desires to know. The king's gate was the place of courtrooms and markets; a place highly populated and trafficked during the day. This is why it was so easy for someone from Esther's entourage to have seen Mordecai.

Mordecai gives all the information to Hathach, including a copy of the decree, which Mordecai obtained from his high position in the government. Mordecai commanded Esther to use her position to overturn this decree. Hathach took this information and told it to Esther.

¹⁰**Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ¹¹“All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.”**

After assessing the information, Esther commands Hathach to inform Mordecai of Persian etiquette and law. The decree of genocide must of impacted Esther, but her first reaction was to point out the reason why she could not use her position to overturn the decree.

The Persian Court was very strict. No one except the 7 nobles (1:4) could approach the inner court of the king unless summoned by him. This was done for protection and perspective. The king wanted to give the impression to the empire that he was a little god—very powerful and impersonal. If this law was violated, it was seen as a capital offense, unless the king would hold out his scepter.

Esther knew and understood this law and the consequences. She explains to Mordecai via Hathach that she does not know when Xerxes will call for her to come into his court. It has been a month since her husband has invited her to the inner court. Esther seems to conclude that it is improbable to enter the king's gate, a place she hasn't been in a month, and actually survive.

When faced with great adversity, we, like, Esther are willing to point out the reasons why we can't commit to the cause, even if it means life or death. We point out that we don't have enough time or that there is no guarantee that we will actually make a difference. Esther was yet to be convinced to risk everything to gain everything for her people.

¹²**And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. ¹³Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”**

Mordecai does not respond well to Esther's perspective of the decree. He tells Hathach (and apparently those with him) to remind Esther of her nationality and purpose. First, Mordecai reminds her that she will end up being killed after her nationality comes to light. Then Mordecai is convinced that God (Jehovah) will not let anything happen to them. Put those two things together and Mordecai is convinced that if Esther does or does not try to save her people through her position she is dead anyway. Even though deliverance will come it will not come in time to save her life.

Mordecai reasons with Esther that she was purposefully and strategically placed in her position at this time to save her people. Even though it was his fault that their people are facing genocide, it seems that Mordecai was using Esther and her position to save their people.

¹⁵Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

This conversation is definitely taking over a longer period of time than seemed through the narrative. This is not SMS or Twitter...this is taken longer with the use of an informant (middle man). This allows for Esther to think through Mordecai's cause to defend their people. Esther buys in to Mordecai's cause and is willing to sacrifice her life to save the lives of her people. She is willing to commit to see this through even if it means breaking the law and losing her life.

Esther calls a fast for all the Jews living in the capital, Susa, for three days. This was a complete fast from everything—food and drink. Esther understood the seriousness of the decree and the importance of begging God (Jehovah) for supernatural support and faith. The seriousness of the decree took her appetite away and she was completely focused on the cause of defending her people no matter the cost. She wanted people to fast on her behalf, meaning she could have the strength to enter the king's inner court without being invited even if it means her life.

Fasting is not a popular discipline for Christians in our society. Fasting is seen as the act of giving something up for a bigger and more important cause. To Esther and the Jews, praying to save their lives was more important than food and drink. Fasting is losing our appetite and growing hungry for God's power.

After getting Esther's orders, Mordecai obeys his adoptive daughter in organizing a three-day fast with all the Jews in Susa.

Esther was exposed to a cause much bigger than herself. At first she pointed out how she would not be able to help the cause. Then she was willing to focus on her purpose and realize that this was a cause worth fighting for. Esther was committed to do whatever necessary in order to defend her cause, including losing her life for the salvation of her people.

Just like Esther, we are faced with causes to either defend or deny. Even though we talked about the social causes that many of us are faced with in our culture, there is a cause that impacts all of us in some way or another. The cause that I am referring to is the mission of the local church. It's Jesus' cause. The cause is simple—connecting men and women to God through the Gospel. Jesus is building His Church through local churches. We are one of those local churches with the cause to advocate.

So we are either connected with God through Jesus or not connected with God through Jesus. We can only be either we cannot be both.

Some of you have found this cause to rally around because of what it means to you. You have a personal connection to this cause, which is originated in your redemption/salvation and your growth as a believer. You want to be part of the cause in connecting people with God through Jesus. In order to advocate this cause, you spend time volunteering in a ministry so that people can have the opportunity (and multiple opportunities) to connect with God through Jesus. You are risking your reputation to share with family and friends about their connection with God. You are willing to commit your life to this cause.

Some of you have not been convinced of this cause. For whatever reason you are not willing to commit to advocate this cause. You are pointing out ways that may never work in connecting people to God through Jesus. You value your time and feel that one hour a week will make little impact in the lives of those who need to have an opportunity to connect with God. If you are honest, you are not risking anything (reputation or time) because you have not bought-in to the cause.

Imagine what your life would be without the cause—connecting people with God through Jesus (the Gospel). Remember back to when you first connected with God through Jesus. Think of the impact that you could have in an hour. Think about the lives that can be changed as the Holy Spirit is drawing people to God.