

## **The Courage to Speak Up (Esther 4:1-17)**

In the year after the close of WWII, Martin Niemoeller, a German Lutheran pastor, wrote these words as he reflected on the actions of the recently defeated Nazi regime, & the *inactions* of those who witnessed it:

First they came for the Communists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews  
And I did not speak out  
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me  
And there was no one left  
To speak out for me

**1. More than 2 millennia earlier, a young Jewish queen named Esther was faced with the dilemma of whether or not to speak out.**

A. The word "*genocide*" had not yet been coined, or the writer of

Esther might have used it, b/c that's exactly what the Jewish people were facing in Esther's day.

- B. Result of Mordecai's refusal to bow down to the evil Haman, so that Haman wanted to destroy not just M, but all Jews in Persia.
- C. **4:1-3**. Threw all Jews in Ahas' empire into deep mourning, none more so than M, who probably felt somewhat responsible for the tragedy that was about to befall his people.
- D. Esther, M's adopted daughter, was at first unaware of the decree that spelled doom for her people. She only knew that M was in deep distress, but didn't know why.
- E. Sent clothes for him to change into, but he refused them. A change of clothes wouldn't solve this problem.
- F. E sent Hathach, a eunuch assigned to serve her, to find out what M was so distressed about, & through a series of exchanges with Hathach as go-betw, E came to realize the magnitude of what was about to happen to her people.
- G. Then E really gets put on the spot: M sent word that she was the only one who could possibly avert this disaster by appealing to King Ahas.
  - (1) A risky venture, b/c it would 1<sup>st</sup> of all mean revealing her own identity as Jew, something M had wisely encouraged her to keep secret - until now.
  - (2) Even more, it was a dangerous move - **V. 11** - E had no reason to believe that Ahas would tolerate her intrusion, much less grant a request that meant going against his own decree.
- H. Then comes the most important vs. in the book - **4:13-14**.
  - (1) When M learns of E's hesitation, he warns her that if she thinks she will be exception & escape destruction, she is sadly mistaken: "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief & deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you & your father's

house will perish.”

(2) M has confidence in God’s Providence that He will somehow deliver His people, even if not through E. Also, a warning to E not to think she will be spared if all Jews die.

(3) **V. 14b** - *"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this."*

(4) I.e., God may have placed E exactly where she is at just this time for just this purpose.

I. **Vs. 15-16.** E is persuaded by M’s words. Calls for a 3-day fast on her behalf by all Jews in Susa, then resolves to go to Ahas, even if it means breaking the law & possibly costing her life.

(1) “And if I perish, I perish.” Not fatalism, but courage. Determination to speak up no matter what the cost.

(2) E realizes she has to commit herself into God’s hands & for the welfare of her people, *not knowing* what that decision might cost her.

## **2. Every day, believers in Christ are faced with a similar challenge:**

A. We’re living in a time & place where there is a strong effort to silence us concerning our faith.

(1) Non-believers are happy for churches to continue to exist, just as long as we don’t say what we believe.

(2) As long as we don’t declare that Jesus is the world’s only hope of salvation, & that the Bible is God’s Word that tells us right from wrong, & the spiritual & moral standards w/in its pages are absolutes, not opinions.

(3) As long as we bless public occasions with our prayers, but don’t say that we are praying in Jesus’ name b/c somebody might not like it.

(4) As long as we do good works in the community, such as feeding the hungry & clothing the poor - w/out bringing

Jesus into it, or using it as an occasion to tell anyone about Him. They're happy for us to function as a social agency, but constantly trying to silence us from being what we really are: followers of Jesus declaring His name in His world.

B. Recently worked our way thru the Bk of Acts, & what we saw there is that we have been sent into this world in order to be *witnesses* for Jesus Christ & His gospel.

(1) And witnesses *have to **speak!***

(2) Last week, saw Mordecai's defiant act of faithfulness when he refused to bow down to Haman. We DO bear witness by our actions as well as by our words. And we love the idea of "being a sermon rather than saying one."

(3) But a "silent witness" won't tell people about their Savior & what He's done for them & how to follow Him. WE have to SAY that.

(4) P. Slate's article on "mission" trips. "What's the mission?" It's good to build houses for people in need, to offer medical services for the sick, to deliver food & clothing - but those are only Chr. "missions" if they become opportunities to tell people about Christ! Otherwise, we have bought into the world's view of the church *vs.* into God's view.

C. Yet how can we keep silent when people around us don't know God, & when our society is drowning in sin?

(1) Speaking up = a very "politically incorrect" thing to do. S. Boteach: "The only sin is to call someone else a sinner."

(2) The real challenge = not only to speak the truth in love, but to speak up at all, b/c that's exactly what the forces of evil try to tell us we can't do.

D. So how do we muster the courage to speak up when we need to?

(1) Just as with E, it's all about *commitment*. A decision, a determination that we WILL do what we've been placed here to do.

(2) And commitment is based on TRUST. EX: **4:14** - Pointed out

that, altho God's name isn't mentioned in Bk of E, the idea of God is everywhere. Most of all in M's words.

- (3) It's the reality of God's providence that underlies this entire story. Where will that deliverance that M spoke of come from? Who has placed E where she is "for such a time as this"??
- (4) It's God who has worked things out so that E is where she is at this moment of crises so she can stick her neck out to save her people - God's people.
- (5) So 4:14 = a challenge to E to trust in God's Prov & do what He has placed her there to do.

### **3. Here's the challenge to you & me:**

- A. There will be plenty of occasions when we will have opportunity to speak for Christ or against wrong-doing.
- B. If we keep silent, do you think everything will go well for us?  
That we'll be blessed?
- C. Make no mistake: Eventually God's will *will prevail* in this world & throughout eternity. But what will *your role* be in seeing that it is done?
- D. Notice that in E's case deliverance eventually was up to God - but it also required the faithful action of God's people. So at the end of the day, will you be one of those who speak up regardless of the cost?
- E. You may be in a position right now to make a significant difference in this world, in the lives of people who are w/out Christ & who need to hear the truth.
- F. You may have been placed by God in your family, your school, your neighborhood, your workplace - "for such a time as this."
- G. Problem is, we only know God's full plans *after the fact*. It was that way for E. - "Who knows. . ?" was a question, not a promise.
- H. We are each called on to commit ourselves to speak up for God

w/out knowing the outcome. To do right just b/c it is right.  
Trusting that God will honor & bless our efforts in whatever way  
He chooses.

Make no mistake: The world wants you & me to keep silent. But God wants us to speak up. It may be costly, but it's part of living by faith in difficult times.

If you haven't yet started following Christ, think seriously about these words:

**Matt. 10:28-33.** When Jesus sent out His disciples: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul & body in hell... So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

Are you ready to acknowledge Him today, by repenting of sin & being baptized into union with Him, so that you can live with Him & serve Him forever?

*Tommy South  
Glen Allen Church of Christ  
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