



SAMPLE SERMON:

DO SOMETHING

ESTHER 4:12-14

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Have you ever been in a meeting where the question was asked, “What are we called to do?” or “What has God called us to do?” I remember the question being asked one night in a beautiful retreat setting, as a group of church leaders met to try to rediscover what God had called them to do as a church. I recall thinking how creative the ideas were and how passionate the church leaders were. As we ended the night, I asked the group, “What is keeping you from doing these things?” Their answers trailed off . . .

Does that scenario sound familiar to you? There seems never to be a shortage of creative and God-centered ideas about what we should be doing. Is the problem not that we have trouble hearing God’s call, but that we have trouble doing God’s call? Is the greatest sin of the church today the sin of “not doing?” Let’s look at Esther’s call. It is a call to risk her throne, her title, her life and to DO something.

The book of Esther opens up with a party. During this party, the King summons the Queen to his chambers to display her beauty. She does not come. The King throws a temper tantrum and banishes the Queen. He then has the empire search to find his next queen. Many girls are brought to the palace and are treated to a year’s worth of pampering, facials and more. Esther receives the DELUXE spa package. At this point in the story we are saying “Oh, to be Esther.” Esther advances through the preliminary rounds of this beauty contest and gets to meet the King. And when that moment happens we are told, he “loved Esther more than all the other women...so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen...” (2:17).

Now Esther has a guardian, her older cousin Mordecai, who as a minor court official is also in a position to win the King’s favor. Sitting at the King’s gate one day, Mordecai hears about a plot against the King’s life. He is quick to tell Esther so she can tell the King, and the would-be assassins are tracked down and executed.

Mordecai is considerably less popular with one of the King’s chief advisors, Haman. Haman conceives a rich hatred for Mordecai because Mordecai refuses to show him what he considers proper respect. Haman is pompous as well as villainous, so he considers it beneath him to deal with Mordecai’s insolence man to man; instead, he conceives a plan to exterminate all the Jews in the royal city of Susa. He gets the King to issue a decree ordering their destruction by telling him that the Jews are people who “do not keep the King’s laws” (3:8). After making this agreement, the King and Haman “sat down to drink,” which we know is the favored activity in the Persian court – “but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion” (3:15).

All the Jews begin weeping, lamenting and fasting; like many of them, Mordecai puts on sack cloth and sits at the King’s gate. Esther is unaware of this up in the palace. She is comfortably distant from the needs of the world. But her comfort is interrupted by the news that Mordecai is running around in sack cloth. Esther is upset to hear this. She doesn’t act like the heroic queen we hope she will be. She simply sends down some clothes to Mordecai. She wants to deal with the immediate problem – my cousin is embarrassing me – but not change society! How many times is that true of us? So often in our lives and in our churches we attempt to do the “little” thing so we don’t have to deal with the “big” thing. Mordecai refuses to change his clothes or to keep quiet. Esther then calls for Hathach, one of the court eunuchs, to find out what is going on. Hathach gets a copy of the King’s decree from Mordecai, and goes to ask Esther to plead with the King for the lives of her people.

Mordecai's challenge to Esther is to let her know that lives other than hers were at stake. His gift to her is to let her know that she is not powerless. "The King may see you as an ornament and plaything," Mordecai implied, "but God has purposes for you far greater than you have imagined." This sudden awareness transformed Esther from a timid beauty queen into a real queen, a decisive, courageous strategist who was ready to risk her own life to save her people.

On this day when we are "considering our call," let's consider Esther's call for a moment. Her calling lacked so many things. It is a brief story. There is no mention that her Granddad pastored a Baptist church or that she played Lottie Moon in the missions play when she was a child. There is very little certainty about what she is doing.

Think about what happens when we answer the call today. We know we are going to show up every Sunday and teach a class or we are going to go to seminary or do missions training or sing. Esther doesn't seem to even know that she is called until the task is pushed on her. Esther didn't have any models to follow. To our knowledge, no one else in all of human history had been called to be a queen to save people from a crazy king. So often when we are called today, we can think of other pastors, missionaries, youth ministers, Sunday School teachers, Deacons, Building and Ground chairs, etc., that have done these jobs before us. From their examples we can kind of get a sense of what we are supposed to do. But not Esther. So often we talk about our calling matching our personality, but that is not the case with Esther. She is timid, shy, not one to make waves. It seems like she would be the last one called upon to give the youth mission trip report to the church. She did not know about political speech and how to lobby the government.

Ultimately Esther's calling is about doing something. Doing something that was unheard of, doing something that was unknown, doing something that was unnatural, doing something that she was greatly unprepared to do. Can you imagine how she must have felt?

A Call is about urgency and risk. You might be the first one – you might be the only one. We have created seminaries, missionary training centers, Sunday School teachers meetings and other places so that people of similar calling could be together. I think that the greatest benefit of these is so people can remind themselves they are not crazy – that God has called other people to do the same thing that they are doing.

What if at the end of today's service or at your small group this week we started to say to each other, "This might sound crazy but God is calling me to _____" or "This might sound crazy but I believe God is calling our church to _____." And then someone in the group needs to be "Mordecai" and say "God has put you here for such a time as this – DO IT!"

Sometimes we miss what God is trying to do. Esther could have spent the rest of her life saying, "How lucky I have been!" or "Isn't it just weird how things work out." She could have chalked up all that had happened to coincidence. Esther could have said, "If God can make me queen, certainly God can help out those people of Susa. Why should I need to do anything?" That is still heard in the false piety of our day, "If God wants to reach people, God will just do it." While certainly God is far bigger than any of us can imagine and can do immeasurably great things, for some reason God called on Esther to act and today, for some reason, God calls on us to act.

As we think about our calling today - can we agree that there are key places God has put us? That there are key things God has called us to do?

How can we put "words" to our calling? A lot of people today are going to hear a sermon on calling and will check out because they have limited God's calling to what we have words to describe.

What's the price of Esther "not doing" anything? Thankfully, we don't know. What is the price of our church not doing what God has called us to do? What has been the personal price of you not doing what God has called you to do?

You might have a calling if you have ever said, "Pastor, someone needs to do something about . . ." Try this experiment this week: As you walk around, be a "noticer" – notice the people around you, notice the needs – then ask yourself, "What is God calling me to do about this? What is God calling the church to do about this?" And then call a friend and discuss it.

"Who knows if you have come to the king's palace for such a time as this." Who knows if God has put you in your workplace, school, neighborhood for such a time as this.

Esther was a servant who did something. She was a servant who took a risk. May we live lives that risk doing something for the kingdom of God.