

Esther

by Jacob Prasch

Jacob Prasch's sermon on Esther highlights the themes of divine providence, the importance of fulfilling one's calling, and the trials believers face in preparation for their purpose.

Duration: 36:30

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:2-3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Esther"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of going through seasons in life. He uses the story of Esther from the Bible to illustrate this idea. The first season is the season of murder, where one experiences death to self and undergoes God's breaking and molding. The second season is the season of spite, where things begin to improve in various aspects of life. The speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking God's will and purpose during times of blessing and prosperity. He also highlights that God has chosen each individual for a specific ministry or purpose, and it is crucial to fulfill that calling.

Transcript

Hello, dear friends, this is Jacob Fast. Wonderful to be with you all. Greetings in the name of Jesus.

You know, the month of February, March, by the Western solar calendar has its equivalent in the Jewish lunar calendar in the month of Adar, the month of Adar. And on the 14th of the month of Adar, we have one of the most interesting and colorful of the Jewish feasts. It's called the Feast of Esther, more commonly known as Purim.

Purim. The Book of Esther is an amazing book. We have the proper version in Scripture, and there's also an apocryphal addition to it.

The Book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish girl who is in the Babylonian captivity after Babylon falls and the Persian Empire arises. She's with her uncle Mordecai, who adopted her. And the king Ahasuerus, the Persian king, is displeased by his wife Vashti.

And in this particular historical episode, a beauty contest is held to find a queen to succeed Vashti. Meanwhile, there is a wicked man named Haman. Haman is a descendant of Amalek, an aggregate from the book of Samuel.

And this person Haman, who is a type of the Antichrist to come, is determined to destroy the Jewish people. But by Esther becoming queen, she has the position and the political influence to bring deliverance to her people. This happens on the 14th of Adar, when the Feast of Purim is celebrated.

What Jewish people do is this. They put on a children's play called a Purim spiel. And the children get dressed up in the costumes of the characters of the Book of Esther, and they act out the story.

They also have special songs, like Shoshanat Yaakov, Baruch Vodahai HaYehudi, and special festival foods, especially something called Cholmantashen in Yiddish, or Oznai Haman, Haman's ears in Hebrew, a kind of pastry baked in the shape of the ears of Haman. Then, in addition to all this, they read what's known as the Megillah, the scroll. And the small children in their costumes, as they dance and sing, sit down to hear the scroll, that is, the Book of Esther read.

And they're given rattles and bells and noisemakers. And because the Book of Esther says that the name of Haman shall be blotted out, every time they get to Haman and his name appears in the text, the children stomp their feet, boo, hiss, and jeer, and they shake their rattles and noisemakers so his name will not be heard, fulfilling the decree of the Book. That's how Jewish children celebrate the Feast of Esther, or Porim, which actually comes from the word for lust, as in the casting of lust.

What does this mean for Christians? In Yiddish type, in Ashkenazi Jewish culture, you have a Haman in every generation. The popes of the Middle Ages, who conducted the Inquisition and problems against the Jews, were seen as the Haman for their time. Adolf Hitler was seen as the Haman for his time.

And the anti-Semitic world leaders alive today are seen as the Haman for our time. Haman didn't like anybody. He was determined to be virtually worshipped and have himself deified.

He'd kill anybody who got in his way while he was on the banks of the Euphrates, but he was particularly determined to destroy the Jews. So you have a political leader who's deranged, demons possessed, on the banks of the Euphrates River, wants to have himself deified and particularly hates the Jews. And he's defeated on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Dar.

The year was 1991. The man was Saddam Hussein. After firing the shrub missiles at Tel Aviv and Haifa, what day did he surrender to the Americans and British? The Feast of Purim.

Same geographical location, same precise day of the year, and the Jewish children were dancing in the streets of Israel in their costumes, reading the Book of Esther. Let no one tell you that contemporary events in the Middle East don't fulfill prophecy. They do.

Jesus spoke of this. Jerusalem would be trampled down by the feet of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Some of these people coming over here teaching Christians to be against Israel, like Ray McCauley's American partner, Rick Godwin.

These men are deceivers. These things in the Middle East fulfill prophecy, and they point to the fact that Jesus is coming. But what does it mean for us? Before we read from the Book of Esther, turn with me, please, to 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 9. 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 9. God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

Notice it says Christ Jesus, not Jesus Christ. When the Bible says Jesus Christ, it's him on earth in his earthly role in some capacity. But when it says Christ Jesus, when it puts his messianic title first, HaMashiach Yeshua, it's him in eternity.

It's him in his exalted glorified space. Notice we have a salvation and a calling. Our salvation is from eternity, but so is our calling.

There's a distinction between our salvation and our calling. In other words, we were not simply saved to go to heaven. We were saved to do something in this life or this world.

And whether or not we do it will determine our reward in heaven. Now this is a separate subject. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents.

He expects a return of his investment in us and in the gifts he gives us. Nonetheless, there's a difference between salvation and calling. Both are from eternity.

The same as God knew we would be saved, we would be born again from eternity if you're a saved Christian, so too he knew what our calling was. He knew what was ordained from all eternity for us to do. Before the world, before the universe existed, God knew who we were.

But before the universe existed, he knew what it was he had for you and for me to do. Now if someone does not fulfill their calling, we cannot always say this means they're not going to heaven. The Bible says their works will be burned up.

They'll be saved as by fire. However, we know this. If we don't fulfill our calling, at the very least we're not getting God's best and we're going to be very sorry we didn't meet our Lord and maker.

Our gift and our calling. Yes, you have a salvation from eternity, but you also have a calling, something God has for you to do. And that was the case of Esther.

With this background in view, turn with me please to the book of Esther, chapter 2, commencing in verse 1. After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. Then the king's attendants who served him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king and let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of this kingdom, that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to sue to the capital, to the haven and to the custody of Hegi, the king's eunuch. Hegi has something to do with the Hebrew word for festal.

Festal is in festivity. Hegi was in charge of the women, the king's eunuch, and he let their cosmetics be given to them. Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti, and the matter pleased the king and he did accordingly.

Now there was a Jew in suit to the capital whose name was Mordechai, the son of Yair, the son of Shemai, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives, who had been exiled with Zechariah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had exiled. And he was bringing up Hadassah, that's her Hebrew name, that is Esther, her Telvi, Akkadian Persian name, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. Now the rabbis tell us that in Jewish thinking, Esther is one of the few females who prefigure the Messiah, and they associate some messianic attribute with her, and that she had no father or mother.

We continue reading in verse 7, Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and mother died, Mordechai took her as his own daughter. So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard, and many young ladies were gathered to suit for the capital into the custody of Hagi, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hagi, who was in charge of the women. Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him, so he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, and gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace, and he transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordechai had instructed her that she should not make them known. And every day Mordechai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared. Now when the turn of each young lady came to go into King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women, pay attention, for the days of their beautification were completed as follows, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women.

Their beautification, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women. The young lady would go into the king in this way, anything she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaskaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines.

Shaskaz was his gentile name. Hegi is what he was called in Hebrew. Now let's look.

The fact that he had two names suggests that he himself may have been a Jew. The king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines would be in control and she would not again go to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name. And verse 15, now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihael, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, came to go to the king, she did not request anything what Hegi, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the women, advised.

And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. She took nothing except what Hegi, the king's eunuch, advised. So Esther was taken to king Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth in the seventh year of his reign.

And the king loved Esther more than all the women and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Ashti. Now a few more verses in chapter four, please, after she's in place and Haman tries to destroy the Jews. This is what Mordecai tells her in verses 13 and 14.

Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, do not imagine that you and the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's household will perish. And who knows whether you have unattained royalty for a time such as this.

In order for her to be in the position she needed to be in to fulfill her calling, she had to win a beauty contest. That was true for Esther and it's true for us. But if she didn't do it, she's told by Mordecai, God will get somebody else.

That is true for you and for me. If we fail to fulfill our calling, God will get somebody else. God chose us, loves us, desires to use us, but he doesn't need us.

Think of the nation Israel. God loves Israel, chose Israel, wanted to use Israel, but he didn't need Israel. God is God.

How did God get Esther where she needed to be? There is much literary symbolism in this text. In chapter one of Esther, we see the seven messengers before the king. The imagery of the ancient Near Eastern court from the sepulchral version of Esther helps paint the picture for the celestial court in heaven in the book of Revelation.

No one could come to the king unless he held out his scepter. As Jesus said, no one comes to the father unless the father draws him. In Jewish thought, God is seen as king.

Blessed are you, Lord God, king of the universe. Now Esther was adopted, the same as Jesus was. Again, the rabbis acknowledge she's a type of the Messiah.

The only female or one of the few who they will accord that to. Esther has an uncle named Mordecai who's of the tribe of Benjamin. Now pay attention.

Haman was an Agagite. An Agagite was another way of saying Amalekite. Remember, king Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin.

He failed to kill Amalek, bringing him under the judgment of God as pronounced and decreed by the prophet Samuel. He looked for some good in Amalek. So because a Benjamite failed to exterminate Amalek, now a Benjamite, somebody from the same tribe, had to make it right.

Once more, you have Amalek. The ancient enemies of God's people will remain his enemies. Those who always persecuted the true church, including false Christian churches, will always come back and get us.

I have many reservations today against what I see as the betrayal and the deception of the ecumenical movement. Those who have always persecuted evangelicals and born-again Christians will do so again. Don't look for any good among Amalek.

They'll always come back and get you. But let's concentrate further. To win this beauty contest, she has to go through the beautification process.

You and I will go through the same process. There were six months of myrrh and six months of spice. The first thing God does in our lives as believers to make us winners, to get us where he needs us to be, is put us in the season of myrrh.

You can be the prettiest girl in the classroom, in school, the prettiest girl in a church, the prettiest girl on the street where you live. But in a beauty contest, all the girls are pretty. It's not enough to be a pretty girl.

You have to be unique. And Esther was willing to do what she had to do to become unique, to please the king. It begins with the season of myrrh.

When Jesus was born, they gave him gold. The magi bought him gold because he would be a king. They bought him frankincense because he'd be a priest.

But they bought him myrrh because he would die. Myrrh is what dead bodies were anointed with. This is what we read in the Gospel of Saint John, chapter 19, verse 39.

Nicodemus comes with a mixture of aloes and myrrh to anoint the corpse of Jesus after he was crucified. In the Song of Solomon, chapter 4, verse 6, another love story. In the allegory of the Song of Solomon, Solomon's romance with Shulamite represents Christ's relationship with his bride.

And in chapter 4, verse 6, the bridegroom says, I will go to the mountain of Myrrh, to the hill of frankincense. The Messiah, Jesus, goes to die for his bride, anointed for burial, to bring the accepted sacrifice. Myrrh is to do with anointing for burial.

The church in Smyrna, same Greek meaning. Myrrh. Death.

Satan will put you in prison ten days. You'll be persecuted. The first thing that happens in our beautification is God brings us to the season of Myrrh.

In Esther's day, the harem was divided into two chambers. And I was shocked to read a book called Princess about the existence of harems in the Persian Gulf, in Saudi Arabia, in Kuwait, where this institution still exists. Only Esther was there voluntarily.

From what I've read in these books, many of the women in these harems are virtual slaves. Even to this day, this happens. It is shocking.

Nonetheless, there were two chambers. Upon the completion of the season of Myrrh, the candidate virgin would be taken to the next chamber, the season of spice. In the season of Myrrh, she would sleep on the floor on a mat.

She had plain clothes and bland food. No cosmetics, nothing nice. There were very strict rules that served no purpose, other than to invoke compliance.

More than that, if any of these rules were violated, the candidate would be scourged by the eunuchs. The eunuchs were emasculated, because the king did not want anyone fooling around with his potential future queen. My son, in Hebrews 12, verse 5, do not regard lightly the correction of the Lord, nor think when you are reproved by him.

For those whom the Lord loves, he scourges every son whom he receives. We're not talking about a Roman flogging here where the flesh is ripped from the bone, but we're talking about scourging. These rules were very strict.

Esther found favor in it. You know, God will bring us to the season of Myrrh first. He will anoint us for burial.

Every Christian that God will use will go through a season of hardship in their lives, a time of breaking, a time of molding. It corresponds in other things to the dark night of the soul as experienced by Jacob. In any event, let's look at this.

Things go wrong. You're confined. One setback after another, it's as if you're in prison and can't get out of it.

And you think God himself is against you in the season of Myrrh. Lord, why is nothing working out? We can't experience the birth of God's vision for our lives until we first experience the death of our own. When somebody's born again, they have new motives.

Praise God for that. We say we're going to use our human ability, our professional background, our experience, our education for God's service. Thank God for those new motives, but that's not good enough.

God gets rid of the whole person. He doesn't just get rid of our bad points. He gets rid of our good points.

He doesn't just get rid of our sin. He gets rid of the sinner. Then he raises it up.

Everything goes to the cross before it's resurrected. Death to self. A season of Myrrh where everything goes wrong.

Yet in this season, God sends Mordecai to encourage her and Hegi to help her. You know, we have so much to learn from older believers who've been through trials and difficult times. It begins with our parents if we're fortunate enough to have Christian parents.

Older brethren and sisters in the church. The leadership of the church. I'm not speaking of heavy shepherding.

I'm speaking of encouragement. I'm speaking of right counsel. I'm speaking of the Mordecais God will bring into our lives to get us from A to B. The Hegis were out to make us win the contest that's before us.

If the candle was successful at the end of the six months, she would progress to the season of spice. You couldn't make the six months go any faster, but you could make it take longer. There is nothing you or I are ever going to do that is going to make the outworking of God's plan go any faster.

It's going to take a certain amount of time to get from A to B. But there's a whole lot we can do to slow it down. The children of Israel could have made it to the promised land in a few weeks, took them 40 years. Nothing will make it go any faster, but there's a lot we can do to slow it down.

Esther knew better. She found favor. She accepted the season of myrrh as God's provision.

Then, however, came the season of spice. In the season of spice, the virgins had different conditions. They had a boudoir even made.

Good food, nice clothes, and whatever cosmetics they wanted. Things went from bad to good. Then they went from good to better still.

We'll come to that in a moment, but understand this principle from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8, verse 2. God tells Israel, through Moses, you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you keep his commandments. God humbled Israel. He actually let them be hungry, in verse 3, feeding them with the manner which they and their fathers did not know.

Yet, once they discovered that man does not live by bread alone, which Jesus would later quote in the New Testament, their clothing did not wear out, nor did their feet swell those 40 years. God humbled them to test them, to know what was in their hearts. Understand what this means.

It's not so God will know what's in our hearts. God already knows what's in our hearts. When he tests us, it's so we will know, and so others will know.

God already knows. That's why it says, let those who will lead us be tested in Timothy and Titus. How does somebody stand in trial? Continuing in the same chapter, verse 16, in the wilderness, he said, you manner, your fathers did not know, that he might humble you, that he might test you to do good for you in the end.

Otherwise, you may say in your heart, my power and the strength of my hand have made me this wealth. But you shall remember it's the Lord your God, for it is he who has given you power to make wealth, that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers as it is to this day. Notice he humbled you that he might test you to do good for you in the end.

Whenever God humbles us and tests us, it's always in order to do good for us in the end. Sometimes we can only see that in retrospect. Sometimes we don't understand how he's trying to do good for us.

Only in the end we know that when he brings hardship in our lives, it's always to do good for us in the end. All things work together for the better to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. We read in Romans chapter 8. Otherwise, pride will come in and we'll say the strength of our hand has made us this wealth.

There's nothing wrong with money, but there's something wrong with us. It's natural ground for pride and self-sufficiency. Paul says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and by pursuing wealth, many wonder from the faith.

Today we have faith prosperity teachers from America, open heretics, who are teaching mammon worship and calling it Christianity. They are not teaching faith in Jesus, but faith in faith. Although the Bible says those chasing wealth will lose their faith, these people say if you don't have wealth, you don't have any faith.

Either we believe the word of God or the teachings of men like Kenneth Higgins, Kenneth Copeland, and the African disciples. But let's look further still. When God shows us how to make wealth, it's that he may confirm the covenant.

Establish the covenant might be a better translation from the Hebrews. He shows us how to make wealth to finance missions and evangelism and to help others, not to have a second and third Mercedes, as the money preachers are telling you. First comes the hardship, then comes the blessing.

This is what Esther found out. She went through the season of myrrh, then the season of spice. Things get better.

When we come out of the season of myrrh, we've experienced death to self. We've experienced God's breaking and molding. Things begin to improve.

They may improve financially, improve in health, improve in career, in business and in ministry. But then comes the real test. When it was each candidate's turn to go into the king, she could have whatever she wanted.

Do you want a blue dress or a white dress? Do you want the red shoes or the black ones? What kind of jewelry would you like? What kind of cosmetics? Anything she wanted. This was the real test. When we are in the season of myrrh, we have no choice but to trust God, to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, to say, Lord, give me the grace to get through this.

But in the season of spice, when we can have what we want, we rely on ourselves. Esther knew better. What do you want? Do you want to study law or medicine? Do you want to live in Cape Town or Port Elizabeth or London? What do you want? Who do you want to marry? What profession do you want? What ministry? Are you going to the mission field? Are you going to a secular business? What do you want? It's your choice.

Be careful. The way we handle blessings, the way we handle prosperity, the way we handle freedom and opportunity is a bigger test than the way we handle trials. We cannot handle blessing, opportunity, prosperity until we've handled trials because of our own nature.

The Lord tests us and humbles us to do good for us in the end. But look at the seven churches of Revelation. It is Laodicea, the lukewarm, materialistic church that is the weak church.

The poor church, like Philadelphia, or the persecuted church, like Smyrna, are the faithful ones. It was not hardship that turned Laodicea into something blind and lukewarm. It was blessing and prosperity.

So it is with us. We can't handle the spice until we've known the myrrh. But the way we handle prosperity, blessing, freedom, that's the real test.

In the season of myrrh, you don't have much choice. But when the season of spice reaches its apex and you can have what you want, be careful. You see, Hagi knew what the king wanted.

The spirit pressures the depths of God. She didn't make her own choices. When you can have what you want when things are good, that's the time to seek the Lord.

Oh God, what do you want for me, for my family? What are you saying, Yvette? That's what Esther did. That's why she won the beauty contest. And that's where she got to be where she needed to be to do what she needed to do.

Had she failed, as we read in chapter 4, verse 14, God would have gotten somebody else. He didn't need her, but he chose her. God chose you for something.

You have a ministry, a calling, a purpose for your life, ordained from all eternity. If you don't do it, God will get somebody else. But he wants you to do it.

He created you to do it. You were born to do it. You were born again to do it.

It'll be a tragedy if you don't do it. He'll get somebody else. Let's look.

Let's understand this. You may be in the season of myrrh. You may be going through a time of hardship, of crisis in your life as a believer, as a born-again follower of Jesus.

Things may be turning against you. Possibly help, almost certainly finance, career, business, education, relationships. God, what's going on? It seems like he himself is against you.

Look to the Lord and look to the Mordechai's and Hagi's God has placed in your life to help you along and encourage you and give you the wise counsel in which there's safety, as we're told in the book of Proverbs. Persevere in the season of myrrh. I don't know how long your six months will be.

I know this. You can't make it go any faster, but there's a lot you can do to slow it down. If you're like Esther, you'll even find favor in it.

Perhaps you're in the season of spice. You now have the freedom, the prosperity, the blessing. I'm happy.

But now is the real test. Once more, the way you handle the good times is a bigger test of your faith and your faithfulness than the way you handle the bad times. Most Christians in the Western world, in the developed world, don't lose it in the season of myrrh.

They lose it in the season of spice. Don't lose it. The Spirit searches the depths of God.

Lord, what do you want me to do with this prosperity, with this freedom, with this opportunity, with this season of blessing? It's my turn to go before the King. Lord, what are you saying? That's what Esther did and she won. She fulfilled her calling.

She became God's vehicle to bring blessing and deliverance to his people. God made Esther a winner and that same God is out to make you a winner. God bless you.

And to our Jewish friends, Chag Korim Sameach. God bless. This is Jacob Pratt.

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