

When particularly stressful events happen to us that can be harmful, most of the time we go into fight or flight mode. Some of us are ready to fight anyone and anything until we can get safe. Some of us run away as fast as we can. Some of us just freeze and are totally paralyzed on what to do. Now, God designed our bodies to protect us and it can almost feel like they take over. Sometimes those are the right responses and they can save our lives. And sometimes we can get stuck there even when the danger has past.

This week in Esther 4, Mordecai and Esther find themselves in a particularly stressful event. They are facing the possible genocide of their entire people. And I as we read the story I want us to pay attention to how they respond.

I want us to see not just how we can respond in a healthy way that will make us better humans. I want us to see how we can respond in a distinctly Christian way. How we can respond as those who have given our life to Jesus and who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Because we should not respond the same way that the world does.

Turn with me in your Bibles and stand, if able, for the reading of God's word.

Point 1: We should lament and fast with faith.

We can respond to events like this one, with fasting and lament.

Now lamenting and tears in general are something that we are all pretty uncomfortable with.

We are not typically a society or a culture that values tears.

Especially for men. Maybe you heard it growing up men don't cry.

Crying is only something that women do.

You can cry once a year or maybe if something incredibly tragic happens

You can put a single tear come down .

We often apologize when we cry.

Even if you were at a funeral mourning the loss of a loved one or talking to someone about the recent loss and you start to cry. We try to stop it and

make it go away and then apologize because the sign of strength is getting through the eulogy without tears.

That is the wrong idea.

That is not a biblical idea

In fact, tears when they were lamenting can be a distinctly Christian and faith filled act.

And there is a distinction between crying and lamenting .

Let's get to the text so I can show you look at verse one, **"When 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."**

Mordechai hears about the the law.

He learns about Haman's plan to have his people annihilated.

And he tears his clothes.

That is not just an elaborate metaphor.

He physically rips and ruins the nice clothes that he has.

He puts on a sackcloth or something that you would wear if you were homeless and had nothing.

He takes ashes from a fire and dumps them on his head and his body .

And then he goes into the very middle of the city and cries loudly.

He does not cry behind, closed doors and apologize .

He does all of this and the open where everyone can see.

Where every stranger who walks by him on the street will understand that this is a man who is in deep mourning.

This is someone who is lamenting something .

And this is all intentional.

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

He goes up to the Kings gate

He does not just go to where people are.
He goes as close to the king as he can get.
But there's a problem nobody can go inside the gate if they are lamenting
in sackcloth.
Even if they normally could.

This is lamenting. This is not just public act. It is also a form of protest.
There is always a new protest somewhere these days.
We have had plenty of protests over the last 250 years of our countries
history.

We are Americans and we like action.
We want our protest to accomplish something or to bring about change.
We want to be public and get carried by news organizations or social
media.

But Mordecai's protest is not just to the king, but primarily to God.
And it has no signs other than tears.
No slogans or chants other than sobs.
Mordecai does not have anger .
Mordecai does not have a sign and a March,
All he has is his tears and his lamenting loudly .

And there's a reason that the people wearing that cloth can't come any
closer because the king does not wanna be disturbed.
The Empire does not want to listen to laments .

Verse three, **"And 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."**

Mordecai is not the only one who laments
All throughout the empire, the Jewish people are lamenting this
mistreatment.
And so all of the Jews are fasting and lamenting together.
They put on sackcloth and ashes and all throughout the empire do this.

Now it's important for us to know that fasting always goes with prayer.
And when all of these actions are taken together, they are act of faith and act of prayer.

This is not just being an emotional showboat.

This is not just the actions of people who are overcome with grief and sadness.

These are people moving towards God in faith.

Because at its core lament is an active faith.

Lamenting is not being sad about your circumstances.

Lamenting is a cry to God that something is wrong in the world.

Lamenting to God, sin has broken something.

Sin has stolen something.

Injustice is reigning.

Lamenting is acknowledging that the world is not as God intended it to be.

So you can only lament in faith.

You have to believe that there is God.

You have to believe that God is in control.

You have to believe that there is meaning and purpose in the universe.

You have to believe that what is happening is a violation and wrong.

And lament is an active faith and prayer to God that he would fix it.

That's why I like using the word lament.

It is more than just being sad.

A particular expression of your sadness, and your grief is motivated and filled with faith.

Faith does not always look like raising your hands in joy and praise

Sometimes faith looks like raising your hands in lament.

And it becomes a prayer when your grief is directed towards God.

Even if the only thing that you have tears.

And also, it comes with fasting.

Now this is intentional fasting.

This is not just fast that comes because you were too sad to eat.
This is refusing to eat, even when you were hungry.
Refusing to eat, even when your throat, your stomach is out to be satisfied.

And fasting always comes with prayer.
The reason that we fast is to show our desperation.
It does show that we need God more than we need food.
We need God more than we need water.
And we need God to answer this prayer because we need Him to sustain us.

So when you fast as you feel the hunger pains.
And as you feel thirsty, that should remind you to pray.
When I fast, when I feel those pains, they are like reminders I should pray right now.
And they are reminders I need God more than I need food.

Now it's become popular to fast.
It is seen as a kind of diet technique like intermittent fasting.
Where don't eat for certain times during the day.
I'm not sure about the validity of that physically or nutritionally.
But I do know that that is not what faith filled fasting is.
That is not prayerful fasting.
Prayerful fasting doesn't eat or doesn't drink for at least a day not just until the sun goes down to pray.

This is what the Jewish people do right now.
They lament and they fast in faith and in prayer.
And if you know the story, you know that God is going to hear their lamenting and they're fasting and He will answer their prayer.

Lamenting and praying and fasting and faith is something that we have lost as the white American church.

I think the black American church does lamenting in faith very well and we should learn from them.

I don't think anyone in the American church does fasting well.

But Jesus told us disciples to fast.

And what is more countercultural in our age of consumer and instant gratification and to deny ourselves food and water because we want to pray because we want to acknowledge that we need God more.

If you don't know where to start small.

The next time that you were overcome with grief at sadness, let it be prayerful and faithful lament.

Take your tears to God.

And I'd ask you to consider adding fasting as a part of your regular spiritual life.

Maybe you start small and you skip a meal and spend the time that you would spend in prayer or feasting on God's word.

But it does need to hurt.

If you normally don't eat breakfast because you're not hungry, you can't say I'm fasting from breakfast now that that's not what it is.

If you have struggled with an eating disorder or have other health issues that would make it impossible to fast, then fast from something you would miss or need like you would need food.

And spend your time praying instead.

We should lament and fast.

But they also comes a time when we must move.

God has not called us to be monks hiding in the desert, doing nothing but fasting lamenting and praying.

We also have to step out and obedience.

Point number two. We also need to act in faith (v. 4-11).

After we finish praying, we need to live like we do have faith.

We have to act.

Verse 4, **"When 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 wants Mordecai to stop.

She hears about what Mordecai is doing, and she sends him new clothes. She wants him to take off the sackcloth to stop lamenting and fasting and to quiet down.

Don't know exactly why she does this.

Maybe she's embarrassed by him.

Maybe she thinks that he's overreacting.

But she wants him to stop and he refuses.

Because Esther is wrong here.

This is the time for lamenting and fasting in faith.

Verse 5, **"Then 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."**

This begins a rather comical back and forth.

Esther and Mordecai are going to have a back and forth argument through one of the eunuchs.

Hathach is going to go back and forth carrying messages between them.

Verse 6, **"Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate,"**

And the reason he has to continually go back and forth is because Mordecai will not budge.

He will not take off his sack clothes.

And Esther cannot leave the palace.

So they talk through this intermediary.

Because Mordecai cannot go past the king's gate.

Verse 7, **"and 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."**

Mordecai tells the eunuch exactly why.

He tells him about the Jews impending genocide and death.

And how Haman is behind all of this.

Verse 8, **"Mordecai 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."**

He gives written proof that this is a law.

It is something that is going to happen.

It is not just rumor or opinion.

And it is possible Esther has not heard about it.

Maybe she is so removed in the palace that she does not hear what is happening.

Maybe she is in flight mode and trying to deny it.

So, Mordecai gives her a copy to read for herself.

But he also requests that she acts.

Mordecai wants her to do something to stop it.

He wants her to beg and plead with the king for the Jews, for her people.

The words used here for pleading and begging are usually used for prayer.

It connects the prayer that they have been doing to action

They have been begging God to act.

Now someone needs to go before the king and beg.

Only Esther is in the right place to do so.

Verse 9, **"And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said."**

He is a good eunuch and passes along the message.

He tells Esther just what Mordecai says.

Verse 10, **"Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say,"**

Now Esther gives her response.

A response he is anxiously waiting for and wondering what she will say.

Verse 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."**

Esther says no.

She says no and then gives her excuses and reasons.

And these are legitimate good excuses.

The first reasons she says no is that she will die.

No one is allowed to just barge into where the king is.

You cannot see him without an official invitation.

This is still true today.

None of us can just walk into the oval office to have a conversation with the President.

You need an invitation.

You would never get in the building.

And if you someone got snuck inside, then you would be lucky to only be arrested.

If Esther tries to sneak in to see the king, she will die.

Her only hope would be if the king spared her life.

If the king decided he didn't mind the rudeness and would see her.

But this seems unlikely.

Because she has not seen the king for a month.

For thirty days, the king has not called.

It is pretty unlikely the king has certainly not spent these 30 days alone at night.

He just spent close to two years that we know of with a different virgin every night.

Do you think this practice has stopped?

Or that now he has become a monogamous man?

That seems hard to believe.

Someone has been with him.

Or many different someones, and none of them are Esther.

Whatever favor she had seems to have faded.

This is why Esther says no.

We might not have been where Esther is.

We may have not faced the circumstances that she is under.

But all of us have had times we should have acted in faith.

And we did not want to.

In fact, maybe we had all sorts of legitimate reasons why we couldn't!

I can't share the gospel with that person, I don't know them well.

I don't want to invite them to church, they may say no.

I don't want to speak up when someone shares bad theology, it might lead to an argument.

I don't want to give to the poor and needy, they might waste it.

I don't want to stand for truth, people will think I am a fool.

Even though we know we should act, we often act like Esther.

We don't want to!

I don't know what your excuses look like.

They probably look similar to mine.

But we do not have to be afraid.

We do not need our excuses.

Because there is good news.

Point 3: **Because our Redeemer will act and He invites us to join Him (v. 12-17).**

The call to lament, fast, and act in faith is not so much a command as an invitation.

It is not something that we must do because the world depends on us. It is something we are invited to do.

And our faith rests not in our own abilities, but in our Redeemer.

We can act because God is already acting.

This is what Mordecai wants to remind Esther of.

Verse 12, **"And they told Mordecai what Esther had said."**

They tell him, Esther says no.

So, how will he respond?

The best way of salvation is closed to him.

How will he respond?

Will he give up or throw himself into despair?

Verse 13, **"Then 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."**

He does not pull any punches.

He tells her that she will not escape this either.

It is not a threat that he will reveal her identity.

It is a warning that she will not be able to escape it.

This is part of the problem with all of our excuses for disobedience.

We can think that faith is dangerous.

It is too risky and scary to live out our faith.

So, like Esther, we can believe it is safer to live without faith.

It is safer to not take a risk and follow God.

Faith seems dangerous and risky.

But it is the only safe path.

Avoiding faith can only ever lead to death.

Esther will certainly die.

The choice before her is whether or not she will head towards that death in faith, or if she will try to hide.

Verse 14, **"For 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?"**

There is so much in this verse.

And honestly, this verse is arguably the most important verse in the whole book.

If you meditate and grasp this verse, then you can understand everything else.

There is so much here, let us take it in sections.

First, he says, **"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place,"**

This is an incredible statement of faith.

He is telling Esther that the Jews will be saved.

He knows and understands the promises God has made to His people.

The promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David.

God will never let anyone completely destroy His people.

Mordecai knows this.

Mordecai believes it.

Mordecai has faith.

He wants Esther to help save the Jews.

But even if she says no, he knows God will still redeem them.

God will keep His promises.

Mordecai believes it even if he has no idea how it will happen.

And he is right.

He also warns her that **"but you and your father's house will perish."**

She can choose to participate with God's redemption.

Or she can perish.

God will save their people, but He won't save them if they choose to not help.

And he finishes the with the highlight for many people.

"And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Notice that this is not presumptuous or certain.

He does not say, "God put you here right now!"

He does not say this is all a part of God's plan.

He just hopes and wonders.

Maybe God has allowed everything to unfold this way, so the people could be saved.

We really should not say things like that.

It is not helpful to tell someone experiencing a miscarriage that it is part of God's plan.

It is not Christian to tell someone their husbands death will be used by God.

We cannot presume to know what God is doing.

But what Mordecai is saying, is that God can still use Esther.

Her hiding her Jewish faith.

Her walking away from her people.

Her decisions to not live a life of faith has not disqualified her.

God can and will use her despite of everything she has done.

And providentially, God has worked everything for her good.

Even her being taken to be a concubine for a pagan king.

In the Presbyterian Church that I was a member at in Dallas had a large number of guys who are going through recovery.

They were recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who had been in and out of rehab many times but they've become Christian and they have finally found healing.

And one of the things that a lot of the guys were talking about that many of them were felons.

A hard part of their recovery was finding work because every job application will have a little box where you check yes if you were a felon. They had changed their life and they put things together and had done a lot of good work checking that box disqualify them right out of the gate.

Some of you might feel that in your life.

Maybe you are not a felon, but maybe there's something that you've done do you feel like God can't use you.

Maybe you feel like it's too late.

What God says with Esther here is that it doesn't matter what she has done.

It doesn't matter which boxes that you have to check of your past sins.

God is not done with you.

And God's grace is big enough to handle your past.

And God in his grace can use you no matter what you have done .

Verse 15, **"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,"**

The drama comes.

What will she say now?

Will she accept the invitation to go to work with God?

Or will she not?

Verse 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."**

Esther makes her choice.

She will lament and fast.

She calls for the people to fast completely for three days.

No water, no food.

For 36 hours, not just during the day.

And Esther will fast as well.

They will fast and pray God will help Esther succeed.

And she is now willing to perish.
If she is to die, she will die in faith.
She will die participating with God in His work of redemption.

Verse 17, **"Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."**

Esther has been doing what everyone tells her.
But now she will take charge.
Now she will come up with the plan and others will do as she says.
She has found her voice.
She is recommitting to her identity as one of the people of God.
And she will live by faith.

Here is the reality.
Christ is our redeemer.
Christ brought redemption and salvation to the world through His death and resurrection.
And He is still doing His work of redemption.
He is still bringing the weary, broken, and lost into His kingdom.
He is still redeeming sinners and making them new.

One of the wonders of Jesus, is that He invites us to join Him.
Like little children going to work with their parents.
We get to go to work with Jesus.
We actually get to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.
This is what Esther does.
She foreshadows Christ.

She is the mediator.
She goes before the king to ask that people may be saved.
She risks her death.
She goes willing to die, but she will succeed and live.
And through her life her people will be saved.

And Jesus is our mediator.
The only one who can stand before God on our behalf.
But Jesus goes willingly to His death and does die.
And His death brings about the salvation of not just the Jews, but the
gentiles, and all the world.
Jesus

Esther could speak for the Jews because she was royalty and she was
Jewish.

Jesus can speak for us because He is truly human and truly God.

The redemption of the Jewish people comes through Esther's suffering.
Her being taken and forced into a harem brings ends up saving her people
The redemption from Jesus also comes through His suffering.
But Jesus did not fall into our redemption.
It was not random chance.
It was not forced upon Him.
He chose it.
He came down in order to suffer with us and for us.
And by His wounds we are healed.

The beauty is that Jesus allowed Esther to play a part in His work.
She gets to point us towards Jesus.
And we to get to play a part.
Jesus invites us to participate with Him.
This is why we were given the great commission.
To go into the world and make disciples of Jesus.

Our every lament.
Our every fast.
Our every moment of faithful obedience.
Every day and second we spend following Jesus, is a part of His work.
What a blessed privilege it is to work alongside our God.

Where have we been this morning?

We should lament, fast, and act in faith because Jesus will redeem us and He invites us to join Him.

When the world seems dark.

Whenever is terrifying and you think the world may end.

Take heart.

You don't need to fight, run, or freeze.

You can have faith.

Because Jesus will redeem His people.

Jesus will redeem the earth and make all things right.

This is a certainty.

Now He will either do that with us or in spite of us.

We can either participate or miss out.

I don't know about you.

But I don't want to miss out.

Let us go leave this place and go into the world,

As those who have chosen to act in faith.

And to participate with our Father in His redemption of the world.