

I spent a year working for a well-known megachurch in Dallas during seminary. One day I was getting briefed because I was about to have a short meeting with the executive pastor, the second most important person the whole operation. My boss had to make sure I knew how to behave in the meeting. I had to dress much nicer than I normally did on the average work day. I had to get a special key so I could gain access to the pastor's office area that was off limits without an invitation. And most importantly I needed to speak correctly. I needed to not ask a lot of questions, especially any kind of challenging questions. I had to make sure I kept eye contact and listened to whatever he wanted to say.

Now hopefully you have not been in a situation like that one. But you probably have had a moment where you had to meet someone important. Maybe it was the owner of your company. Or you had to go in front of a board and present a proposal. And you needed to make sure that you did everything to the best of your ability so your request could be made.

That is the situation Esther finds herself in this week. She has been preparing to go before the king. The day has finally come and now she goes. And I think this story has something to teach us about prayer. Because in a very real sense, prayer is going before the throne of the King of the Cosmos and making a request. Like Esther, we want to be sure we are doing that correctly.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Esther 5.

I. Prayer requires wisdom (5:1-8)

Esther is going to be wise here.

She has made the decision to act in faith.

She is risking her life to save her people.

What I want you to see as we go through this chapter, is that all of her actions are calculated and faithful.

They might seem weird.

It might look like she is taking her time, or being timid.

But everything she does is on purpose and is wise.

Let's look.

Verse 1, **"On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace."**

For three days Esther has been fasting and praying.

No food or water at all.

Now the time comes.

So, she takes off her sackcloth and clothes of lament.

Now she puts back on the royal robes.

She dresses like a queen in all her regalia.

Because remember, no one in sackcloth can stand before the king.

Coming in sackcloth would be even more risky and offensive than what she already does.

If she comes in sackcloth, the king will know she is angry or something is wrong.

If she comes in the royal robes, he knows she has something important to say, but he does not know what.

His curiosity will be peaked.

So she puts on the royal robes.

And she stands in the palace.

She stands where she can be seen.

And she just stands and waits.

Can you imagine what those moments would have felt like?

Waiting to see when he will notice.

And waiting to see what he will do.

Verse 2, **"And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter."**

The moment comes.

The king finally sees Esther is standing there.
And once again, **"she won favor in his sight"**
She will not die.
Her actions and behavior.
The way she has acted with wisdom, please the king.

We then get the description of a golden scepter being held out and her touching it.
It is very public ritualistic action.
It is like a drama playing out in the court.
Everyone sees and everyone knows what it happening.

He extends the scepter to publicly accept her presence.
And it acknowledges he will hear her request and petition.
She touches the tip of the scepter to accept his grace.
And to begin her request.

Verse 3, **"And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom."**

When I heard this story growing up, I always was excited here.
Because look!
The king has spared Esther.
And the king is willing to do whatever Esther wants.
God has answered her prayers.
All the fasting worked better than expected.
All she has to do is say, "please save my people."

But that is not what she does.

Verse 4, **"And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king."**

Esther just asks the king to come to a feast.
She invites him to a private dinner party.
This seems anti-climatic.
And I used to think maybe she does not have enough faith.

I did not get why she waited.

But, if you look closer you can see the wisdom in what she does.

Because this is not really a sincere statement.

This appears to be something kings say.

This is part of the ritual as much as the scepter extending and being touched.

We see this repeated later by Herod at his birthday party.

It has changed somewhat by that time.

But it is not exactly a sincere offer as much as repeated words.

If she actually asked for the half the kingdom, he would refuse.

But she only asks for him to come to dinner.

Part of this is not just that she wants his company.

It is also a signal that the request is not for public ears.

The details of it need to be discussed in private.

This would make him more intrigued.

Verse 5, **"Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared."**

He quickly and publicly agrees.

Everyone in the court knows he has promised to give a favorable answer.

And they will talk about it more at the feast.

From studying the book, we know the king loves to feast.

He and Haman are more than happy to drink more.

Verse 6, **"And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.""**

They have been drinking more and having a great time.

But now the king wants to know.

What is her request?

And he repeats the refrain again.

Now, two times the king has promised to give a favorable answer.

Her request is even more likely to be answered yes.

Verse 7, **"Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: ⁸ If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."**

She again asks for him to come to dinner.

She continues to dangle the hook.

The king is going to go crazy wondering what Esther's request is.

In fact, next week we will see that he cannot sleep.

Mostly because he is wondering what in the world she is going through all this trouble to ask about.

There is a sense in which Esther is reversing the first chapter of the book.

Vashti refused to come when commanded.

Esther comes when she was commanded not to.

Vashti would not come to the feast.

Esther invites the king to a feast.

Vashti risks her life to save herself.

Esther risks her life to save her people.

Everything Esther is doing here, is wise.

And it is filled with faith.

She has spent years in the Persian court.

She knows how this game is played.

She knows how much time she has before the day comes when her people will be destroyed.

So, she goes through all of this to give the best chance her pleading will be answered.

Because faith does not have to be foolish.

Having faith means trusting God.

It means that you put your hope in Him.

It does not give us license to act like fools.

You can have faith and wear a seatbelt.
You can have faith and go to the doctor.
You can have faith and wear a mask and get a vaccine.

If someone told me God called them to plant a church, I would tell them to use wisdom and prepare.

Go to seminary, get trained, gather people together.

Don't just sell your stuff and move.

Prayer and faith doesn't mean you can act like a fool.

Use the wisdom God has given us.

Esther should go ask the king for mercy.

But she should do so wisely.

Which she does.

And so we too should act with faith and wisdom.

Wisdom is one of God's gifts.

And He will give it to those who ask in faith.

Faith is not an excuse for stupidity.

We should not see Esther's acts here as devoid of faith.

Nor should we see them as devoid of wisdom.

She uses both.

We should to.

But something amazing is happening.

Even though Esther has not made her request yet.

II. God begins to answer our prayers before we notice (5:9-14)

We get an interlude focused on Haman.

We see what he is up to in the evening after the party.

What I want you to notice and keep in mind here in this section.

Is that God is answering Esther's prayers.

God is answering the prayers of Mordecai.

He is already delivering them from danger.

God will save Mordecai's life before Esther even asks the king.

Verse 9, **"And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai."**

Haman leaves the party thrilled having had the time of his life.

He is happy to have been included at a party with only the King and Queen.

But his joy is ruined.

He sees Mordecai.

And Mordecai still continues to refuse to bow.

Mordecai does not respect or fear Haman at all.

And this enrages him.

A year has past, but he is as angry as he has ever been.

Verse 10, **"Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh."**

This is important.

And if you read too fast you might skip over it.

Haman restrains himself.

Haman could have Mordecai killed right now.

Mordecai is breaking the law by not respecting Haman.

He could probably kill him himself, or have him executed tonight.

But instead, he holds back.

He wants to come up with a more satisfying plan of murder.

So he will not do it yet.

What you need to see, God is already answering their prayers.

Mordecai should be dead.

But God is saving him right now.

God is keeping Haman from killing Mordecai.

He will try to do it in the morning, but again God will save Him.

Even though Esther has not asked yet.

God is already saving them.

And this is something they will not know.

Mordecai and Esther did not know what Haman is thinking.
They don't know Haman is planning.
But God saves them from it.

I don't know if we realize how much God works on our behalf.
We do not understand how often God listens to our prayers.
Just like Mordecai has no idea how close to danger he is.

Verse 11, **"And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king."**

Here Haman goes through the list of all the blessings that he has.
He talks about all of the money that he has .
He's opening up the bank account and showing all the numbers were counting every dollar
He is talking about all the sons that he has.
All the men who will carry on his name and his legacy.
He's talking about all their accomplishments they spread his influence and his greatness .

About all the promotions that he has been given.
All the way that he has climbed up the ladder from where he started to where he is right now .
He is now the second most powerful person in the whole empire and possibly the entire world .

Verse 12, **"Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king."**

And he is in the inner circle.
He gets invited to the most elite and private of the parties.
He gets to go we're only the king and queen are
Not just once but twice.

They enjoy his company so much. They want to do it again tomorrow night.

This is a man who seems to have it all.

But it is not enough.

Verse 13, **"Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."**

This also shows the foolishness of idols.

Haman seeks influence and power.

He is the second most powerful person in the kingdom.

He is in the inner circle of the king.

Everyone knows him and he has all he could want.

But it is not enough.

It does not satisfy his heart.

Ultimately, none of that is satisfying .

We are nothing but dust.

Life is a vapor and a moment.

No matter how much money you have or how many children you have or how much success you have or how much achievement or fame or influence you have.

It will never be enough .

You will always want more .

Our idols and make big promises, but what they cannot bring what will give us true and lasting satisfaction.

All the blessings that he has are undone because there's one person of the Empire that doesn't respect him.

This shows us not just the emptiness in Haman's heart, but the empty everything in the world has .

Without Jesus, it's not enough.

I need to remember that, even though it seems like Haman is on top and Mordecai is on the bottom, by the end of the story their positions will be reversed.

And God is already working towards that end.

And for those who, in this life choose to walk away from Jesus to embrace their sin, it might seem like everything is going their way, but God is already working towards a different end.

And for those who follow Jesus, who are praying and wishing and wanting blessings have an experience, I want you to see that God is working towards that end.

Even if you cannot see it yet

Verse 14, **"Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.**

Haman's solution to his Mordecai problem is once again extreme.

He does not want to kill him or have him killed normally.

It needs to be over the top.

Because our idols always demand a sacrifice.

And so he decides to build a gallows.

Now the Hebrew here is actually slightly unclear.

There are two options for how gallows and hang can be interpreted.

It is either a place where you would hang someone by their neck.

Or he is commanding that they build a giant wooden spike to impale him.

Either one is going to kill you.

Either one is ridiculous.

Because he wants something built at 75 feet or about 23 m tall.

And that's gonna take some time.

But he wants it built right away, and they will work all night to fashion this instrument of death.

Just thinking about murdering others makes Haman glad.

There are times God is answering our prayers, even when we do not see it and even if it seems like nothing is happening.

I can think about before Brianna and I came here to Tanglewood. We spent many months close to a year, praying and looking and thinking and trying to figure out what God had for us.

And for much of that year and over those long months, it seemed like God was not hearing our prayers.

I could only see the things that weren't happening.

I could only see the doors that were not opening.

And I didn't know at the time was that God was working and was answering my prayers.

Pastor Brad was getting ready to retire.

Committees were getting together to pray and think and talk about what kind of pastor you want to have a next.

Eventually, it seemed like all of a sudden, God answers our prayers and we come here.

And even when we came, it seems like an answer to prayer.

The years since have proved this church was everything we were praying for.

But I didn't know it for a long time.

For most of us, that's how our prayers are also going to work. There will be seasons when you're praying and praying and praying and you can't see what's happening.

Don't lose faith.

Trust and know that God is at work.

That God is already answering your prayer.

Doesn't mean it's gonna come true the way that you think it is a way that you can predict.

But you do need to know that God is always working.

Sometimes we forget that God is busy running the universe.
They're billions of people in it.
He is spending a lot of plates.
He is juggling a lot of balls.
And our perspective is limited
If we could see if we can understand all that God is doing at the present
time we lose our minds.
How He is moving and working all the universe together.
So that all things can be reconciled and united with Christ.

So, when you're praying.
As you are being wise, but things seem slow.
Have faith that God is at work .
He is working all things for the good of those trust Him.

III. God answers our prayers through Jesus, not cunning tactics.

Again, this story is about Esther having to use all of her wisdom and political prowess, so that when she goes before the king as a mediator, he will hear her request and will respond positively.
What I want you to know is that that is not how we have to behave when we go before the throne of God with our prayers and with our requests.

We do not have to approach the throne of God with three days of national fasting.

We do not have to approach God with our best clothes and royal robes on.

You can come before God in your oil and greased covered clothes.
You can come before God in your tears and when you are a mess.

And we do not have to manipulate God into answering our prayers.
We do not have to invite Him to feasts first.
You do not have to put a few hundred dollars in the offering box in order to get your request.

You do not even have to use the most eloquent theologically rich language in your prayers.
You do not have to find the perfect way to express what you long for.

Sometimes we can act as if we need to sprinkle certain phrases in our prayers.

Like as long as we pray "if it be your will."

Or "in the name of Jesus."

Those are good things to pray.

But they are not part of a necessary ritual.

As if you forgot to say them, then God would no longer answer you.

God already knows what you want to ask.

God already knows what you need.

Just ask.

The reason we can pray.

The reason we can boldly come before the throne of grace, is because of Christ.

Jesus Christ is our mediator.

He was truly man and truly God.

He died and rose again from the dead to repair the rift between us and God.

He removes our sins as far as the East is from the West.

And now, only because of Jesus are we able to pray.

From the oldest and most saintly of us, to the babies in the back.

Not because of our skills, or works.

We can do so because of Jesus.

So we pray in His name, because He is the only way God hears us.

Jesus is the reason we can speak with God.

Jesus is the reason we can do so without fear or fancy tactics.

One of the things I'm afraid of is that we don't take prayer seriously enough and simultaneously we don't understand how incredible is that we can pray.

We don't recognize what a gift Jesus has given us.

We use it so often that we forget our special and unique it is.

God has made Himself so available and so accessible to us that we do not always appreciate Him.

Prayer is something that we get bored by.

Prayer is something that we neglect.

Prayer is something we treat as optional.

Through Jesus, we have access and can boldly go before God any time.

And He doesn't promise to give it to us, but He promises to listen, to care and however, he answers will be for our good and he will give us something better than we could've imagined.

And our response to that often I don't know if I have time to pray.

Response to that is prayers for other people

Responses to think that I don't know if I really want to pray in front of other people I might get nervous. They will think about me instead of getting nervous or caring about what the god of the universe would think about us.

Prayer is an unbelievable, incredible gift and we just treat it so flippantly. What if we recognized what a gift it is.

I'd like to try.

Here's maybe just a practical idea of how you can put this in practice.

The next time you pray.

Whether it's before your lunch or your devotions.

I want you to close your eyes and imagine yourself entering and walking into the throne room of heaven.

Imagine that you were walking past the 24 elders with golden crowns.

You were walking past the 12 apostles who are ruling and judging over angels in the nations.

You were walking past the Seraphim and the incredible creatures that we read about Ezekiel and Daniel and revelation.

You're walking before all of them as the creatures around the throne are singing out nonstop. "Holy holy holy is the Lord God Almighty."

Imagine approaching the throne where God sits.

And you can finally gaze upon God and all of his majesty and all of his splendor.

Imagine that you were standing there in that place and Jesus Christ is right beside you smiling at you ready to interpret and plead on your behalf whatever it is you're about to ask.

Imagine that you're at that place and remember every time you pray you really are there.

Whether you recognize it or not.

And recognize the beauty in the wonder that you and I really can't talk to God when he just thrown right there without fear without trepidation without going through the proper rituals because Jesus has mediator, and Jesus is beside us.

Where we been this morning?

CONCLUSION:

1. Prayer requires wisdom.
2. God begins to answer our prayers before we pray.
3. God answers our prayers through Jesus not cunning tactics.

My story at the beginning of my meeting with a pastor probably appalled some of you. And it should have. The reality is that meeting with Jesus is not like that at all. You can come as you are before God. No matter what you have done. No matter who you are. Jesus will welcome anyone who comes in faith.