**Leap of Faith: Our Strategy**

**Esther 4**

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Our Senior Pastor Ritch and his wife, Kimberly, are on Sabbatical for a few weeks. Before he left, we were enjoying a journey through the Book of Romans, toward that awesome promise of chapter 8, verse 28, that “for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, all things work together for good.” And to prepare our hearts to appreciate what that guarantee entails, we turn to the story of Esther.

Esther is a story about real people in a real crisis. It is so gritty and so human that the author decides not to once mention God. It’s a deliberate choice to intentionally limit our focus on earth to highlight the influence of heaven. Seven chapters remain for us. This is a celebration of the beauty of destiny.

Our first lesson, chapters 1-2 revealed the problem of depravity, in *Trouble in Paradise*. Last week, chapter 3 exposed our enemy in *Rise of the Nemesis*. Today in chapter 4, we study our strategy and what to do about it in *Leap of Faith*. We’re going to read these verses as we walk through this story.

No one moved a muscle. They were paralyzed with terror. How should someone react to such a gruesome event? It happened in June of 2008 beside a highway in California, in the town of Turlock. Drivers who saw the scene began to pull over. A 27 year old had his 2 year old son on the pavement, and was stomping and kicking him, brutally. The onlookers had no idea what to do. So, after shouting at the man and calling 911, they just watched. At least six witnesses, including a volunteer fire chief, and a 20 year old man arrived at the scene and looked on without interfering as this man kicked his son over 100 times. The violence finally ended when an officer arrived by helicopter and was forced to shoot the man dead. But by then, his young son had already died. This is what some call the bystander effect. It is when witnesses are frozen in fear, stunned in shock. They have no knowledge of how to help, so they just stand by and stare on in horror.

The city of Susa is in an uproar. It is full anxious alarm and panic. The king just signed into law a Jewish genocide. An entire nation just received the death penalty. The worst bill in history passed without even a vote. The date of execution was scheduled for one year away, and the countdown begins. The result is mass hysteria. The word on the street was that this murder was not decreed for no reason. The man behind the edict, with his arm around the king and a sinister smile on his face, is the nation’s second-in-command, named Haman. He had bribed the king with a huge chunk of silver. This Jafar-like adviser had made his move. It was not a simple political agenda. This was a savage personal vendetta. The target was set upon Mordecai, the Jew. The one man who refused to bow because of an ancient feud. This was no simple mistaken sentence. This was a move of malicious vengeance. And now, all of God’s people’s lives were threatened in danger. They tottered on the brink of annihilation. Their plight spiraled the entire city into chaos. Law and order it seems, had gone with the wind. If Haman could pull such strings to wipe out a nation, no one was safe from his spite. This city stirs in trouble and confusion, and all the while, the king parties it up with his friend in a fresh brew. And for God’s plan, His promise and His people, this is no small pickle. The decree is unchangeable, the bribe amount unmatchable, and the king’s mercy unreachable.

This time, in how the chess pieces lie, there is no way out. Satan has made his move, and to everyone watching, it appears that the Jewish God, Yahweh, has finally failed the match. It’s not yet Checkmate, but the clock is ticking. The entire kingdom was in shock, waiting to witness the Jews’ politically mandated execution. But there is one secret they don’t yet know. There is a delicate hope for the people of God. A young Jewish orphan, upon becoming queen, will one day bring a chance here before the match ends. And Mordecai will seek for her help, but will she answer the call? She is confronted with a choice, a desperate dilemma, a terrifying risk, a leap into the darkness of faith.

Even today, evil is on the move. The spreading consequences of sin, the invisible influences of Satan, the growing impotence of society, the attack like an aggressive form of cancer. Sin costs! It always costs. Satan kills! He always kills. Society caves! It always caves. And evil gains momentum. This world of humanity is increasingly unstable, ambiguous morality, spreading heresy, growing apathy. It is a dangerous time for the people of God. We’ve discussed our depravity and exposed our enemy. But what should be our strategy? Evil demands a response. We can’t do nothing. We can’t ignore it and we can’t avoid it. So what do we do about it? How do we react? Look at Esther chapter 4 and you’ll see at least three components in our strategy for responding to evil. There are three components that will each rise from a scene in the chapter. In Scene 1, verses 1-3, we find a nation in mourning. In Scene 2, verses 4-11, we meet a queen in crisis. In Scene 3, verses 12-17, we will witness a leap of faith. Each step in the drama reveals a different component of our strategy. Evil demands a response. How do we react? Here are three ways.

**I. Feel the pain of evil.**

This was a nation in mourning. To mourn is to feel or show deep sorrow. We think of black attire, candles or processions with sober songs. But for all the emotion of America, we tend to work hard at hiding our mourning, our grief. But in other cultures, mourning is expressed outwardly, very visibly through tears and sobs and rags and wailing. And this was a custom of the ancient Near East.

In one of my trips to Mozambique, we used to do Vacation Bible School. There was this little boy who was around six years old. We’re doing VBS, and he got sick. Within a few days, he passed away. And we stopped everything we were doing. We just stayed quiet for a couple of days while the village grieved. There were women, especially the mother and sister, who just sat at the door of their little hut. And they rocked back and forth, weeping and wailing as if their cry was a song of despair. They were in mourning.

In Esther 4:1-3, we find a nation in mourning. They were mourning because of this decree of death. It was an order of annihilation for God’s people. Everyone will die--men, women, children. Every possession will be stolen. It will be a total genocide. It’s a complete reversal of 1 Samuel 15. The Jews and their Benjaminite leader Saul, had stolen forbidden spoil. They had left alive the Amalekite king Agag. And now a descendenat of the Amalekite king, Haman, has a grudge against the Benjaminite, Mordecai. And he’ll wipe out the nation to plunder their spoil. So the nation mourns. There are three observations about this grief, this mourning.

1. It is painful--it affects Mordecai dramatically.

It is deep and it is painful on an individual and a corporate level. We look first at the individual, Mordecai. The news affects him dramatically. He responds in agony, misery, anguish and lament. He is mourning because the decree is somewhat his fault. It is a brutal Holocaust sparked because he refused to bow. Now everyone suffers. So he mourns visually and publicly, even vocally.

***1*** *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.*

He rips his garments. He dons a rough, uncomfortable sackcloth, covers his head with the ashes of shame, braves the confused city square, and he releases an unforgettable wail of grief. It is loud and bitter. There is no mistaking that this mourning is deep and painful.

2. It is purposeful--it is intended to affect the authorities.

It is intentional. Based on his location, it seems that he wants to draw attention. He wants to mourn as noticeably to the king as possible.

***2*** *He went up to the entrance of the king's gate…*

He is ready to appeal if an audience could be earned. So he takes this lament as far as is legal. This is not necessarily a complaint *against* the king, but it is definitely one *to* the king. And that’s as far as he gets, though. He reaches his limit, the extent of the appeal. He can get no further than the entrance. Why? Verse 2. Because of the royal dress code.

*…for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.*

There could be smiles only. No frowns were allowed. They wanted only happy thoughts for the king. No mourning in his presence. He’s got the image of paradise to maintain, after all. If you’ll remember when Nehemiah was in the palace, when the king noticed he had a sad face he was afraid, even terrified because the palace was not a place of pain, but of pleasure (Nehemiah 2:2).

So Mordecai is shut out. The king can’t hear. He is insulated. He is cocooned. He is disinterested in the pain and is distanced from it, withholding both access and empathy. He is busy feasting with Haman. So Mordecai needs a mediator, someone to intercede for him from within the gate. And perhaps this woman, Esther, was his plan all along. This deep and painful mourning is very purposeful.

3. It is public--it affects the whole community.

It is corporate. There is a wave of grief. Mordecai is the picture, the representative of the Jews, and the entire nation follows close behind.

***3*** *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.*

In contrast to the court’s feasting, the Jews are fasting. That means they’re not eating. They are so upset that they don’t want to eat food, and they’re probably taking extra time to seek favor from above. And if you haven’t noticed yet, feasting is a major theme in this book of Esther. It’s not the kind of book you want to read when you’re hungry. In every other chapter, they’re talking about a banquet, a feast. The entire book is building toward one giant celebration of a feast. Except here, there is a stark contrast. The mourning Jews are fasting. This is painful, purposeful, public mourning. Here’s the point. Evil hurts and it should be lamented. It should be mourned, wept over, grieved for.

I loved my grandpa. I didn’t have an opportunity to mourn him when he passed away. There were some complicated family matters. We didn’t get to have a funeral, and I didn’t think too much of it at the time. My grandpa has a twin. I didn’t know him very well. They looked and sounded so much alike. I hadn’t had many conversations with him, but one day I called him to set up a time to visit. And I could hardly make it through a one minute phone call. All of the sudden, I hear his voice and something inside of me breaks. And I just start sobbing. It just strikes me so suddenly. Evil hurts!

How do we respond to it? We don’t ignore it. We don’t avoid it. We feel it. We acknowledge it. That’s something the world is afraid to do because to experience pain without God is terrifying! So the world is in denial and full of distraction. Technology and websites, Apps for your comfort, and tv and amusements and endless entertainment, alcohol and drugs to numb you, medication to fix you, products to please you, employers that need you. And we’ve got a world of tough guys and strong women secretly afraid to feel pain, to show grief, to be sad.

There’s a husband and wife who traveled to Kazakhstan to adopt a son. They go into this orphanage and they experience something kind of shocking. The orphanage is under-staffed, overwhelmed, and the children haven’t received proper care. But, they are doing their best. As this couple walks into the room full of 20 cribs of infants, not a single one was crying. There was silence. If you work in our nurseries, you know that’s not normal. So they said, why is it so calm. It’s not because they’re sleeping. It’s because after crying for so long without a response, the babies had given up. They learned weeping was pointless. They just shut down. This is our world. They’re not crying out because they don’t believe there is anyone to answer.

The king can’t hear. He’s insulated, cocooned, disinterested, distanced. Isn’t this how people see God? The doctrine of Deism says He is far away and unfeeling. But this is not the God we serve. We serve a God who cares, who understands. He sent His own Son to die on the cross for your sins, to feel your pain, to give you hope. We have a God neither distant nor disinterested. He is a God who even weeps. He is a God named Jesus. And for all who believe in Him, this mediator intercedes on our behalf before the very throne of Heaven.

**(Hebrews 4:14-16)** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Because of Jesus, we’re not afraid to feel the pain of evil. Because of Jesus, you can experience it deeply, fully, truly. You don’t have to drown out feelings with distractions or substances. You can feel what is going on. Because of Jesus, you can exercise your pain purposefully, through prayer. You have access to the top authority and you have confidence that He will listen. You can pray about the bullies at school, the frustrations at work, the challenges in marriage, your rebellious child. Jesus knows and He cares. And because of Him, you can express your pain corporately in the church. The Body hurts together. When we feel evil, we don’t feel it alone. We mourn in unity. It’s what the church is for.

I remember such sweet times in the past where we trusted God and prayed and wept for a young girl that had passed away due to an illness, and a young mother who passed away due to illness. The church mourned together. We do this together. Evil demands a response. It hurts and it should be lamented.

The first component in our strategy is just to feel the pain. You’re free to feel it because Jesus feels it too. But not everyone is in the same situation, or experiencing the same things. For some people, it would seem as if the pain could be avoided. And the second component in our strategy against evil, the way we respond after we feel its pain, we

**II. Face the peril of evil.**

Peril is danger. It’s threat. It’s trouble. There’s a few unique individuals among us who tend to enjoy confrontation, but in general, most of us like to avoid it. And there are some perils that will never leave us alone. Some evils cannot be avoided. They must be faced.

When I was a teenager at home, there were some mornings where I didn’t respond to my alarm. My parents would say, “Time to get up!” and I would push the limit, you know, pretend to be asleep. On a few occasions, I’d hear their footsteps approaching just in time to enjoy a cold glass of water to the face. And one day in California stands out above the rest. It was September, in 2001. I knew I’d slept in. I could see the sun peeking through my window. And I hear my mom bolting up the stairs. So I sit up to pretend like I’d been awake for a while, ready for this water, but the day is different. My mom just looks at me and she says, “You’re still sleeping? We’re at war!” And she runs back down the stairs. What was that about? And now I’m in shock, when I come downstairs and I start hearing New York reporters talking about some tragedy and interviewing a man covered in debris. And I slept through it. I began to realize that 9/11 is a day that I will never forget. There’s no denial, no safety net, no avoiding it. Terror had come to us! And our nation was changed forever. As the dust began to settle, everyone’s question was “What next? How do we respond? This is a crisis that must be faced!”

In chapter 4, Scene 2, after this nation in mourning, we find in verses 4-11, a queen in crisis. This dilemma rolls as a sort of snowball, building momentum throughout the scene, moving forward in three stages.

1. Confusion: Esther fails to comfort Mordecai.

There was confusion about the crisis in verses 4 and 5. Then a sudden realization about the crisis in verses 6-9. And then third, serious hesitation because of this crisis in verses 10-11. Confusion, realization and then hesitation. A queen in crisis. Stage 1, confusion.

Esther begins a bit out of touch. She’s oblivious. She’s unaware of this edict and the plight of her people. And so she’s told about Mordecai’s mourning.

***4****When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed.*

What is going on? The word there carries the idea of twirling or spinning. She’s so upset that she’s probably pacing back and forth, turning around. “What do I do? What’s going on? Why would he do this?” And it’s uncomfortable. She’s been cocooned in the palace and she doesn’t know why he is sad. So what does she try to do? She tries to change his mood. “Take off those rags. Put on some clothes. Stop making such a scene.” Verse 4

*She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.*

If you step back, the story of Esther also carries another strong theme of clothing. They represent a change in circumstances. For now, Mordecai won’t change. But perhaps the symbol of clothing will play an important role later on. It’s a question that we’ll leave unanswered today. But here, his clothes are a problem because he can’t enter the king’s gate. And Esther can’t talk with him. They don’t want to reveal their identity. So, what does she do? She sends a trusted servant, a man named Hathach, to find out what is going on and why.

***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.*

Stage 1 of this crisis is confusion.

2. Realization: Esther receives a request from Mordecai.

There was realization of the cost. After beginning a bit out of touch, she catches up to speed. Hathach does some research, and here we find out what is going on.

***6****Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate,* ***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.* ***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.* ***9****And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said.*

He goes back with a mouthful. This isn’t some assassination plot he’s reporting, now. This is an extermination plight. Along with the message, he gives a copy of this decree and a statement about the money. Things are dire. Mordecai says, “Code Red! This is desperate. It’s time to do something. Call in your favors. Intercede on our behalf.” You can imagine Hathach’s face as he kind of gives this stuff to Esther and she looks over it. This is an awkward and dangerous task for him. And it must have been nothing compared to the face of Esther. Things are worse than she could have even imagined. Stage 2 of the queen’s crisis is realization.

3. Hesitation: Esther gives an excuse to Mordecai.

There was hesitation because of the risk of engaging this crisis. She began out of touch. She’s finally caught up to speed, but now she lands in a bind. Her empathy is informed. Her urgency here is conveyed, but now, her safety is endangered. She sends Hathach back, who has become a bit of a royal ping pong ball here. He goes to Mordecai with another message. And her reply is a bit hesitant. It should receive our close attention, because here is the first time in the text where we read actual dialog.

***10****Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say,* ***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.”*

Hathach comes with a direct message from the queen. “Everybody knows the king is locked away. And if you try to enter uninvited, the law is firm. Instant death! And the only exception is if the king happens to be in an unusually benevolent mood. He can extend his golden scepter to save your life. And it’s a terrible time because I haven’t even seen him in a month.” Why? We don’t know. But, it’s enough that Esther seems to doubt her ability to win his affection. The odds are stacked against her. And besides all this, she would be challenging Haman, the king’s right hand man, who the king himself had granted top position and influence. And she would be opposing a handsome bribe. She would be standing between the king and his honor, and the king and his money, ripping fresh meat away from a hungry lion. We all know what happened in chapter 1 when beauty went up against honor. Beauty lost! To enter the throne room to ask for help was not only risking her neck, it was probably pulling the trigger.

And so she says to Mordecai, “Do you know what you’re asking?” Confusion, realization and hesitation. The snowballing crisis is gaining momentum and ushering Esther toward a moment of truth, a decision, a choice. But before we see what she will do, we stop to consider the truth that evil is here. It can’t be avoided. It can’t just be appeased or pacified, satisfied. We can’t allow peril or evil to have its way. It must be faced! It’s uncomfortable. It’s unsafe. But you can be certain that it is here. This isn’t paradise. This world is corrupt and evil affects us all. It must be faced. And it’s something that without God, we can’t do. Just like facing pain without God, facing peril without Him is also terrifying. So beyond just denial, the world is in a defensive mode. It is resigned to fear, to protecting the comfort that they can gain. Avoiding trouble at all costs, defending comfort as if evil is somehow going to get tired. Giving ground to keep peace, forgetting that at some point, there’s no ground left to give. This is our default mode. We want to ignore the problem. And in some ways, we can, right? We can succumb to evil, bow to its demands, run from its challenges, yield to its temptations. But we can never outrun the dilemma that we, without Jesus, will be punished for our sins.

**(Romans 6:23)** For the wages of sin is death…

No matter how much man can avoid evil’s peril, life will ultimately end. And the question is, will you face it now with courage by the grace of Christ, or will you face it on the last day in condemnation beneath the guilt of all your choices as your blabbing conscience demands your destruction? Evil is here and it cannot be avoided. But from it, you can be delivered.

Jesus confronted Satan. In this world’s evil, He never bowed. In courageous love, He died on a cross so that you could be set free, and He extends His gift of righteousness. It’s amazing here that even as the queen, Esther can’t ask the king for help. But for those who believe in Jesus, no one can steal us from God. We’ve been adopted as sons. As sons of the king, we don’t have to fear any peril. We have the power of God to save and protect and we can draw near to Him as a Father.

**(Romans 8:15-17)**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry,“Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

We need help! Yes, it will be hard, but it’s always worth it.

**(Romans 8:31)** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is Jesus and because of Him, we can face peril and acknowledge it genuinely. We can get real about its intensity. We can be sure that the Gospel doesn’t just offer platitudes. It has power.

**(Romans 1:16)** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Because of Jesus, we face peril and we can consider it thoroughly. We can be clear about its severity. We can dive past the barren shallows of superficiality, into the beautiful depths of vulnerability, and say what is really going on in our hearts. We don’t have to have fear of man.

**(Hebrews 13:6)** So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

An intimacy can be restored with God and within the Body. Because of Christ, we can face peril courageously. We can confront it and be ready for our responsibility. We can use our position to trust God in wisdom. And even if we’re in the battle, Psalm 27 would remind us:

**(Psalm 27:1)** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

We have God. And you know what, He can make you the queen of Persia, and it may be the toughest gift you’ve ever been given. Following Jesus is never easy, but because of Him, we can face the peril, be real about its intensity, clear about its severity, ready for our responsibility. We face it! Evil demands a response. It is here, and it can’t be avoided. We’re free to face it because Jesus has been and will be there with you.

Once you’ve recognized that the peril of evil must be faced, you need encouragement. How do we respond?

**III. Have faith in God’s plan.**

We need encouragement that there is still hope. To have faith is to believe, to trust.

It was in a very similar dilemma that another group of Jews once sat. The king of Babylon had ordered everyone to bow down before his golden image. And in spite of the idolatry, they refused. So, they were brought before this king.

**(Daniel 3:13-30)** Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” He answered and said, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Who do you suppose was in the fire with them? When they came out of the fire, they didn’t even smell like smoke. The fire had no power over their bodies. Never put God to the test. Don’t challenge God. He will prove Himself! This is the God in whom we place our faith. But it’s a faith that for Esther will now be tested. A foreign ruler and a deadly decree. Will she have faith in God’s plan no matter what the cost?

After the nation in mourning moves the queen to crisis, and in verses 12-17, we witness her leap of faith. There are three observations about this leap.

1. It’s imminent: Mordecai gives Esther a dose of reality.

It’s certain. It’s unavoidable. Here it comes. Mordecai hears her concerns and he gives her this warning. It’s almost a pronouncement of judgment here. It’s close. He’s not messing around. He said, “It’s your choice, but don’t be mistaken. This is do or die.” This is emphatic. Here is dialogue. It’s like you can see the tremors in his writing.

***12****And they told Mordecai what Esther had said.* ***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.*

Don’t let the soft palace pillows and rich royal foods get to your head.

***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.*

We see that there’s a sober caution and there’s a strange confidence. The sober caution is clear. “Don’t think you’re special because you’re in the luxury suite. You’re a Jew like the rest of us.” And I’m pretty sure it was rare for Mordecai to raise the sensitive issue of her parents to this orphan he had adopted, but here, he brings it up. “There’s nowhere to hide, dear cousin. And if you cower away in the palace, you and your father’s house will perish.” Mordecai warns her, “You’ve been isolated, but that can’t save you. The evil of Haman will find you out. And when it comes to the king’s pride, he’s not beyond banishing beautiful queens. And in fact, Xerxes never says no to an adviser. Haman has control here. Esther wouldn’t stand a chance. Sometimes the greatest motivation to jump out of the frying pan and into the fire is to realize that by doing nothing, you’re still sitting in a frying pan. And this is the imminence of this terrifying leap.

But, along with the sober caution, there is this strange confidence. “If you don’t step up to save the Jews, someone else will.” Through the clouds, there is this ray of hope. Evil may be determined to fight, but it is doomed to failure. Mordecai is certain the Jews will be delivered. He doesn’t say how. He doesn’t say why. But, there is this underlying assurance that they’ll be saved. He’s convinced there is an invisible hand somewhere. That they are special people. And he’s not alone. This confidence about the Jew’s silent protector will slip out from a much more menacing mouth next week. The impact of the message here is simple. Evil is here, but there’s still hope. The leap of faith is imminent.

2. It’s fortunate. Mordecai tickles Esther’s curiosity.

It’s deliberate or fateful or providential. Mordecai says, “Take a step back and think. Think about it. Maybe things happen for a reason. Maybe there’s a higher meaning. Maybe you’re here for this exact moment.” Verse 14

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

It could be that this leap is fortunate, deliberately designed for the salvation of God’s people. There’s no mention of God here, but that seems to be the implication. That the Jews have an unstoppable force on their side, a hint of the power of God’s promise. It is a promise that He would send a Savior through this people. It is a promise that they wouldn’t be destroyed.

You say, “Well, where is God? Why did He let the Jews lose their country and get sent into exile in the first place? Why are they even in this position?” Because God made another promise. He said, “If you disobey, I’m going to send you into exile. And I’m going to discipline you until you repent.” God always keeps his promises. They are here because God keeps His promises. And Mordecai seems to acknowledge this. He seems to speak with faith here, that maybe there’s a point. “You were born beautiful for a reason. That reason was to win the king’s favor and end up in the palace for a purpose bigger than your own comfort. Maybe you were destined to reign as queen for this very act.”

This is the third time in the chapter we encounter the word “know.” The first one, you don’t see in this translation. The Hebrew word is the same, “know” in verse 1. Each time you hear the word “know,” it’s used in a life or death context. Verse 1, Mordecai knew the Jews were condemned to death, but Esther didn’t. And in verse 11, “everybody knows that entering the inner court without summons condemns you to death,” Esther says. And she thinks Mordecai doesn’t know that. In verse 14, he says, “Who knows whether or not Esther is here for this purpose?” And the question is left in the air. Who knows? We know who, but they could only hope. The fact that everything happens for a reason can give you great courage based on this hope. Here’s this leap. It’s imminent. It’s unavoidable. It’s fortunate. It’s providential.

3. It’s desperate: Esther and the people begin their appeal.

It’s unalterable. This choice means almost certain death. It’s going to be an act of faith. As far as Esther is concerned, she’s heading to an execution. But she leans back anyway on this delicate thread of a hope, this thin possibility that her life has a reason from a higher power of providence. She commands a fast. It doesn’t say explicitly that the people prayed, but the signs point in that direction. There are some people here praying, a request for divine favor.

***15****Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,* ***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.*

Remember, the people have already been fasting. Maybe God is working and answering some prayers already. But Esther and the women join them.

*Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”* ***17****Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.*

She accepts this fate thrust upon her. But she doesn’t do it without some fear. She says, “If I perish, I perish.” Her language, it’s hard to know. It seems like it reflects a bit of compulsion, a bit of not despair, but deference, of submission to the providence of God. “Though it’s against the law, even if it costs me my life, I have no choice. If they kill me, they kill me. If I die, I die. But providence proves that my only choice is to act.”

It’s reminiscent of the statement that Jacob makes back when his youngest son, Benjamin, is forced to be sent to Egypt. He’s stuck between a rock and a hard place. He’s afraid he’s going to lose his son. And he reluctantly acknowledges that providence leaves him no choice. He says, “Take him. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved.” (Genesis 43:14) I am not the one in control. Who is? There’s a higher power at work. And the hope is not in the outcome, but in submitting to His providence. And we trust His wisdom.

Before we close out this act, in verse 17 you’ll notice the beginning of a role reversal. Esther was obeying Mordecai, but in verse 17, now Mordecai is receiving orders from her. She’s taking action. And in chapters 5-7, we’re about to learn that Esther is not just a pretty face. She takes a total leap of faith and she tells everyone to start fasting because she’s getting a running start.

At the end of the day, the truth remains that there is always hope. However delicate, however slender, there is this thread of hope that always bears our weight above the dark chasm of evil. While that hope remains, evil must be confronted. It must be challenged, opposed, withstood, contested. As fragile as God’s promise is, don’t reject His hope. Do not think you can find another way. God is in control and there is but one way. The world is committing to trying to find their own way, to find their own hope. Because faith in God’s plan is terrifying. So beyond being in denial and defensive, the world is deluded. They reject God’s plan and His promise to save, and they’re hoping that either they don’t need salvation or that they’ve found another savior. So many people have backup plans. And we see this culture of moralism, or a culture of legalism, or a culture of consumerism. “These other things can help me. I don’t need God right now.” It’s like a man who has a fiance, but he keeps a girlfriend on the side just in case. And he ends up losing love altogether because you don’t actually get to enjoy love without taking a trusting leap.

**(Luke 9:24)** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

This is how you accept God’s offer. By taking the leap of faith.

**(Hebrews 11:1)** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

It’s a leap into darkness. It’s scary! But verse 6 says

**(Hebrews 11:6)** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

You have to trust in Jesus. When you need help, who do you look to but Jesus? Because

**(1 Peter 2:21-25)** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

God is in control and I trust Him! Trust the good and visible hand of God. No one was more faithful to trust God’s promise and confront evil than Jesus. He is God’s promise and the confrontation of evil. He is God’s victory and our very deliverance, and yet the most fragile of hopes. Very God conceived in the womb of an obscure young woman. God, as a vulnerable baby. A victim of flogging and a mock trial. He suffered cruel execution and bore the wrath of the eternal Father. Could any hope be more delicate? And yet there is no hope more dominant. God’s power in weakness. Waiting, in what appears from our perspective to be a chess game of life, until the very last move to prove He’s in total control and that this is no uncertain game. This is unstoppable glory.

The life we’re called to live is a life of weakness, a life of death, a life of trusting in the slender hope of the Gospel, confronting the evil of the world with faith in a story. A story of a man who came and died. And yet who rose again, ascended to heaven, and promises to return. Because of Jesus, you can have faith in God’s plan and you can choose it decisively. You can make your pick seriously. You can’t avoid the discomfort of faith. You have to think about taking this leap without a backup plan. Not trusting in yourself or anything else to save you. You can’t keep sin on the side and take the leap. Taking the leap is cutting ties with sin. You choose it decisively.

Because of Jesus, you can have faith in God’s plan and trust it expectantly. You can think big about God’s strategy and look with lenses that are not natural, but supernatural. And say, “God has a purpose. He’s been moving and shaping and growing me.” You may not be achieving your goals, but you can be sure God is achieving His. He’s revealing where things are different and He’s asking you to trust His goodness. You can trust His plan expectantly.

And because of Jesus, you can have faith in God’s plan and you can settle it entirely. You can take the leap with certainty. Commit at any cost, even the cost of your life. And until you’re ready to take that leap, you cannot know the true greatness of God. Choose it decisively. Trust it expectantly. Settle it completely. Make your pick, stay alert, take the leap. This is our God. Evil demands a response. Our strategy is one of faith. Will you take the leap? Jesus has already done it, and He’s there to catch you. He feels your pain. He faced your peril. He is God’s plan.

This summer, I was trying to teach my daughter how to swim. So we’re out there and she’s proving my skills are not as good as I thought. We go to the pool and we’re working on kicking and blowing bubbles and trying to get her to jump into my arms. We’re in this tiny little kiddie pool, but for a three year old, it’s pretty scary. It’s actually dangerous! I’m asking her to jump into my arms. It was quite an experience because my daughter is a thinker. And so, she’s asking questions, expressing concerns. “How far is it?” We’re like inches away from each other. “I don’t know about this.” I said, “It’s okay. You can trust me. I’m strong enough to hold you.” Finally, she sort of half jumps and just kind of falls and closes her eyes. And I catch her and she’s totally fine. And she says, “That was easy.” I say, “Yeah, I know. Do you want to do it again?” “No, no, no, no, no!”

This is how we are. We get scared. We hesitate. We finally muster a half jump to God and He proves Himself faithful. Once we’re safe we say, “Oh, that wasn’t so bad.” And God’s like, “Do you want to do it again?” and we cringe. But we know how terrified and hesitant we were. We forget that our safety has nothing to do with the skill of the jump and everything to do with the strength of the One who is catching you. Evil demands a response and it’s ours to take the leap.

Esther will go before the king. And her life and the fate of the nation hang in the balance, resting on the whims of this brash ruler and the mercy of his golden scepter. Or maybe not! Perhaps their fate rests in the arms of another. But for now, Esther takes the leap, and she begins to fall. And so now we wonder, is there any hope? And that’s a question we’ll answer next week when we come for chapter 5 and stand in awe of God’s supremacy in part 4, *A Turn of Fate*.