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For Such a Time as This!

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Esther 4:12-16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is the third in a series of sermons about spiritual gifts. God of course has poured out his grace on all of us exactly the same. God doesn't play favorites. We are all unworthy sinners who deserve nothing from God. But God has equally forgiven us through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. It's the same grace for all of us. But... God in his wisdom has decided not to give all of his gifts to any one of us. Instead he gives different gifts to different believers.

God has created us to be beings who are made for community. We are all dependent on God and interdependent with one another. We are not meant to live in isolation. One of the gifts God gives to the people of his church is the gift of generosity. The dictionary defines "generosity" as liberal in giving. I would add to that definition. Generosity is liberal and "selfless" in giving. Giving in a way where there is greater regard for the many than for just myself.

So today we want to look at what generosity is by looking at the book of Esther. We won't have time to look at it in detail, so can I ask you to read the whole book sometime this week? It won't take you long.

The book of Esther tells a rags to riches story of an unlikely woman becoming queen. First the rags. Esther was Jewish woman. She and her people were living as captives in a foreign country. The Jews would have rejoiced to have been treated as second class citizens... but they weren't even afforded that. The Jews had been deported to the region after Jerusalem fell at the hands of the Babylonians. These were tough times, and even more so for Esther. She was orphaned and raised by her older cousin.

But then came an opportunity to change everything. The King of Persia, Xerxes, felt that his Queen, Vashti, had disobeyed him and disrespected him. He consulted with his advisors, who told him that if he didn't do something, then all the women would take her example and disrespect their husbands. He needed to make an example of her. That's what he did. He declared she was no longer queen.

Again, at the advice of his advisors, Xerxes decides to hold a kingdom-wide queen competition. The most beautiful, eligible women of the kingdom were invited to compete. And of course, they needed to look their best for the king, so they needed a complete make-over. But we're not talking a day of primping before meeting the king. Oh no! Compliments of the king, they were treated to an entire YEAR of beauty treatments. Special skin treatments, cosmetics, perfumes... they got it all. What's more, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the haram, really liked Esther. So in addition to the same pampering everyone got, Esther received additional special treatment. Even if Esther wasn't chosen as queen, she definitely had the good life living in the king's haram.

After a year of preparations, it was finally Esther's turn to spend the evening with the King. He was immediately taken by her. The competition was over. Esther was the new queen! From rags to riches, Esther has it made.

Now let's pause the story right there for a second. What often happens to people who make it big? Doesn't it often go to their heads? They sometimes abandon the "little people" they used to associate with. They think much of themselves. They live an indulgent lifestyle. They develop huge egos and convince themselves that they deserve every bit of it, and that it's all about them. How many stars seem to have this attitude? We'll see in a minute if Esther developed a celebrity ego.

But first, let's not villainize celebrities as if they are the only ones who struggle with egos, or a "me first attitude" an "I deserve it" mentality. Can I ask you for a moment to evaluate yourself honestly? Let's first start with where you are really gifted. What is it you are really good at? What is it that you have a lot of? Are you very successful at **work**? Have been recognized with awards or promotions? Do you have seniority from your long stay? Or maybe your top dog in your **neighborhood**. Your neighbors look up to you. Or maybe you have a particular **talent** and others have recognized it. Maybe you're especially **social** and have lots of friends. Or maybe God has blessed you with lots of **money**. In any of these areas, ego and sinful pride creep into our hearts. We can begin to believe we deserve our position or status or awards or compensation. We take credit for the gifts that actual came from God, and are to be used for his glory. We become selfish with the use and management of the gifts God has entrusted to us, instead of being... *generous*.

In Romans 12, just before a description of the spiritual gifts God give, first were these words: **"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you"** (Romans 12:3).

Was Esther's power, prestige and wealth going to her head? Was she thinking of herself as she ought, or was she becoming proud? Was she starting to put her comfortable, affluent lifestyle above humble service to God? Little did she know the unimaginable test she was about to face.

I left a little detail out earlier. The king did not know that Esther was a Jew. She has kept that fact hidden, figuring it would possibly disqualify her from the competition.

Listen to what happens next. Esther's cousin, the one who raised her, Mordecai, would not bow down to the king's right-hand man, Haman. Haman had a huge ego and wasn't content to just get revenge on Mordecai. When he discovered Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided that genocide would be the best way to get even with Mordecai. Haman convinced the King to pass and edict that sanctioned the extermination of the Jews. The edict was published throughout the kingdom that on a certain day, anyone could attack, kill, and destroy anyone who was Jewish and stake their property for your own.

Mordecai was horrified. Because he wouldn't bow before a man, his people faced extermination. He sent word to Esther, the queen, the cousin he raised as a daughter. He told her she had to do something! She was the only one that seemed to be in a position to save her people now.

What would she say? Would she blow her cover and identify that she was Jewish? She was human and so she hesitated. Here's why: 1)The law stated that no one could enter the king's presence... not even the queen... unless summoned. If she tried to speak to the king without the invitation, she could literally be put to death on the spot. 2) Even if the king did listen to her, if he discovered she was one of the Jewish people, he may have been outraged. He may have killed

her, believing she had deceived him. He could have allowed her to be included in this edict allowing the destruction of the Jews. Everything was on the line.

Mordecai addressed Esther's concerns with these important words that we want to listen to carefully: Esther 4:12-16 **When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"** Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: **"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."**

Everything was on the line. "What would it cost to save the people?" A throne, a crown, claim to a kingdom, a royal name, royal position, royal perks... a life. It was all on the line. But I'm not talking about Esther. I'm talking about our Savior. When everything was on the line, thank God Jesus was not about himself. Thank God Jesus was generous... and he gave everything.

For our selfishness and lack of generosity... for our obsession with comfort and our exaltation of self... we deserve extermination. We deserve that God would banish us from his presence for all eternity. Instead he sent his perfect Son. His humble Son. **"(Jesus) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"** (Philippians 2:5-8)

Can you let your mind race through the Gospels and remember Jesus' selfless living and generosity? When faced with people in need, Jesus helped. Jesus gave. There was one time in particular that Satan tempted Jesus just to one little selfish miracle for himself. After 40 days of starving in the wilderness, Satan said, "Just turn this stone into a loaf of bread and feed yourself!" But even at that time of isolation, when no one would know about a tiny little selfish miracle, Jesus stood firm. For such a time as this, Jesus had come to save mankind.

And his desire to save people facing extermination led him even to the cross. Where the Creator of all things allowed his creation to pound nails through his hands and feet and hang him on a rough wooden cross. There he suffered in agony and isolation, giving everything, for you and for me. Because of his sacrifice, the debt of our sin was cancelled. Because of his sacrifice, the King, Almighty, Holy God, declares us to be not guilty... and far more. He says we are his children and that we inherit his Kingdom. All praise be to Jesus our Savior who was born for a such a time as this: to save his people from their sins!

By the way, Esther did act boldly for her people. She spoke the king and her life was spared. The king issued a new edict allowing the Jews to fully defend themselves. Mordecai was honored. Esther saved her people... the very people, in fact, through to whom was born Jesus.

Now let me ask you this: what time is it? I don't mean look at your watch. I mean, ask you self. Has God put you into your current circumstance and situation for such a time as this? Is it time to serve him and others generously? Is there a ministry in our church that you could adopt and run with? Or a new ministry that would serve a need and you can fill it? Is there an outreach

opportunity in our community that you could capitalize on? Are there people in your life that would be blessed if you were bold and shared Jesus? If we more selfless pooled our resources is there more we could do to bring Jesus to Omaha... and to the world? Has God placed you here for such a time as this?

I encourage you today to take a step back. Step outside of yourself and your needs and your life and your world, and see the bigger picture into which Christ has placed you. God has given you opportunities to be instrumental in saving others! Will you be **generous** with your time, generous with your talents and abilities, generous with your world possessions? Will you give yourself fully to the work of the Lord? Friends, all you have and all you are is a gift from your heavenly Father. You are gifted to GIVE... give generously. God has placed you here... now... for such a time as this. Be generous. Amen.