

## FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

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This past week, in my personal devotions, I've been reading through Jeremiah, and I was struck by the poignancy of some of the words that we find in this book – just the breaking of God's heart, as it were, as he talks about what's going on in Judah. And he tells them: "You know what happened to Israel. And yet, it doesn't bother you that you continue to live the way that you are living." We know that Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, and that Judah too eventually. But as I read through this book, I've been so drawn by God's back-and-forth, as He talked about what will happen to them. Yet, almost a little bit of hope that if they turn toward Him, then He will relent.

Jeremiah 7:23 He says, "But this is what I commanded them saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people. And you will walk in all the way which I command you that it may be will with you.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear."

It seems to me that we never learn from our mistakes; we don't learn from history either, because we look at our own lives where we get to the point and say: My goodness! This happened to me. Or this happened to somebody, and I could have learned a lesson from it, but I didn't. Then I'm left to reap the consequences of my actions.

This week, I'm going to lay before you two Old Testament scriptures. Allow me to speak them in my own words.

### **THE BOOK OF ESTHER**

The first is from the book of Esther. If you haven't read this book, I would invite you to read it. it's a small book and you can finish it in 15-20 minutes. But it's one that is so full of beautiful truths that can be garnered from it.

Esther has become queen after the king banished his previous queen. There is an evil man called Haman who doesn't care much for the Jews. Mordecai, who is Esther's uncle used to sit at the palace gate. And every time Haman used to pass by, Mordecai refused to acknowledge him. And this kind of got Haman's goat. He didn't like that. He had the ear of the king, and so he went to the king and said, "There's a group of people here who don't observe our customs or our culture, and it would be good for us to get rid of these people." The king agreed to this plan, and so they sent out a decree saying that all the Jews can be killed on this particular day.

Mordecai hears about this, and he sends a message to Esther and tells her what is going on, and that something needs to happen. Esther tells him, "I can't do anything because nobody can go into the king's presence unless called. And the king hasn't called me. If I go and he doesn't raise his scepter, I may be killed."

Then Mordecai replies in 4:13-14. He says to Esther, "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace, you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this!"

Two points grab one's attention here for me.

1. In v. 14 he says, “If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place.” Here’s the thing – God’s plans and God’s purposes don’t go unfulfilled if we don’t do our part. God looks for other people who will be obedient.

I remember when we first started CAP, one of the things we sensed was that God was in a hurry to establish the things that He wanted. I remember sharing with the church that I pictured God as rushing water, just moving in and not waiting to wear down rocks through denudation or whatever, but would go around the rocks. There was an urgency to what God wanted to do, that He was able to go around obstacles, but would find willing hearts and people who would establish His purposes. And that’s what Mordecai is saying: Don’t think if you don’t do what God wants you to do, that God cannot establish it through somebody else. God is sovereign.

2. He points out to Esther’s place and her position and says, “Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for such a time as this.” In other words, you’re in the palace, and have you ever thought that the reason you’re in the palace as queen with the power that you have, is because God has placed you there for such a time as this, when the Jews are going to be annihilated. We’ll come back to this.

## **1 CHRONICLES 12**

This is second scripture that God has placed on my heart and it talks about how David was going to be establishing his throne. We saw last week how for 13 years, even after being anointed as king, he had to wait. Not only wait, but run for his life as well, because Saul was out to kill him. But now, both in Ziklag and in Hebron, people are coming in droves to join him. It’s interesting as we look at the kinds of people who are joining him. From v. 23 onwards:

<sup>23</sup> These are the numbers of the men armed for battle who came to David at Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him, as the Lord had said:

<sup>24</sup> from Judah, carrying shield and spear – 6,800 armed for battle;

<sup>25</sup> from Simeon, warriors ready for battle – 7,100;

<sup>26</sup> from Levi – 4,600,

<sup>29</sup> from Benjamin, Saul’s tribe – 3,000,

<sup>30</sup> from Ephraim, brave warriors, famous in their own clans – 20,800;

<sup>31</sup> from half the tribe of Manasseh, designated by name to come and make David king – 18,000;

<sup>32</sup> from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do –

<sup>33</sup> from Zebulun, experienced soldiers prepared for battle with every type of weapon, to help David with undivided loyalty – 50,000;

<sup>34</sup> from Naphtali – 1,000 officers, together with 37,000 men carrying shields and spears;

<sup>35</sup> from Dan, ready for battle – 28,600;

And so on and so forth it goes, listing all the twelve tribes of Israel. All of them were ready to come behind David. And as you look at this group, they are all fighting men, warriors, ones who have gone through hardships and survived, ones who have been resourceful, who have crossed all kinds of problems and situations and yet come through victorious.

All of them, except for one group. It says in v. 32 “from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do – 200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command;

In the midst of all this valor, there was a need for somebody, some group to be able to say: This is the time to do what God is calling us to do. They needed somebody outside of all of these warriors to let them know what God’s will was in accomplishing His purposes. They were men who understood the times – the sons of Issachar.

I put these two scriptures together I just felt that they needed to come together. On the one hand, “who knows if you haven’t attained royalty or been made queen for such a time as this.” And then from Issachar, “men who understood the times.”

### **Why are placed here in this time?**

Here’s the question that kept coming back to me as I looked at Esther and Mordecai. I looked at my own life and I asked the question: Why am I placed here? Why are you placed here in this time? Why were you not born in the last century? Why this century? Why are you in Mumbai? Why are you here at CAP? What resource, what authority, what thing do you possess that God’s eyes are on, that He’s saying to you: Who knows that I haven’t placed you here because of this thing that you have. That’s why you’re here, that you haven’t attained this thing that I have endowed you with.

Sometimes we look at a situation like this and we think: Oh yeah. It’s the people who have money. It’s the people who have some kind of authority. It’s the people who have clout. They’re the ones that God is talking about. No! God is talking to each one of us, beloved. You may say to yourself: I’m going through a difficult time. God uses your difficult times as well. you can say to yourself: I’ve been hurt. God uses your hurt. You can say to yourself: I’m going through such a challenge in my relationships. God uses that challenge. You can tell yourself that God has taken somebody that I cared for. God uses the comfort that you need to also give comfort to somebody else. Every situation that you are facing, beloved, is something that is gold in God’s hand, that He can use for such a time as this. It’s not the resources that you have. We move ourselves away so easily and say: I’m going through a very difficult time, so I’ll wait till this has passed by, and then I’ll step in and do what God wants me to do. And it’s in this situation that God looks at you and says: Who knows that the way that I want to use you is through your brokenness, through the difficulties that you are going through, through your lack of provisions, through the finances that you don’t have – that’s how I’m going to use you. Who knows that we are not where God wants us to be because of something that we possess?

### **What does God want me to do?**

Then the question for us is: What change is God wanting to affect through me using this resource of His that I need to yield to Him, that I need to be obedient to Him? He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. Always. The things that God does in our hearts are not meant to be held, but to be shared. So, as we distill these two scriptures, we ask ourselves: In this time, why am I here? Am I doing what God wants me to do?

### **Discern the present.**

Then look at the second scripture. For me to understand the first, I need to be able to discern the present, to be able to understand what part of me God wants to use. For He makes all things work together for good – all things, the good things, the bad things, the difficult things, the easy things, all the challenges, all the joys, all the sorrows, all the brokenness; all of this He takes. That’s who He is, beloved, as God. Lord, what part of me are You wanting to use. Lord, I need that kind of discernment in my life; I need to understand the times like the sons of Issachar.

Two things God has placed on my heart for us as a church, as we look ahead to the days that are in front of us – two things that I believe He wants us to focus on.

#### **1. The Area of Prayer.**

Prayer is the one discipline that’s going to allow us to know how God wants to use us. “My house shall be called a house of prayer.” Paul says in Ephesians: “Pray in the Spirit on all

occasions with all kinds of prayer.” Different kinds of prayers and requests. Be alert. Always keep on praying for all of the Lord’s people.

## **2. The Area of Authentic Discipleship.**

We really shouldn’t need to put an adjective before discipleship, but we do. Because somehow, discipleship by itself, hasn’t cut it over the years that we need to put ‘authentic’ before discipleship. I put that because that’s what I believe we need to seek after. How can we be authentic in our walk as disciples of Jesus?

In the weeks ahead, let us explore that together. What does it mean to be an authentic disciple of Jesus? And then we’re going to look at prayer. Once again, we are going to have our Wednesday Bible studies, and we’re going to do it on Prayer. We’re going to explore prayer and see how we can connect to God, not in terms of getting more knowledge about prayer, but getting to know how we can use prayer more effectively so that we can understand what God’s will is for us, and thereby influence how we understand authentic discipleship.

Before I leave you, I want us to have some thoughts about discipleship in our minds as we go through this week. Basically, we’re going to do a face to God and a face to humanity – face to God with prayer and face to humanity in terms of being disciples.

What should we understand as we think about disciples? What should we keep in mind? Three things Michael Youssef writes about that are so key.

- 1) Love one another. Be in genuine loving relationships with fellow believers. When we look at Romans 16, we see the list of people that Paul talks about at the end. He cared for all of them, and we need to care in that manner.
- 2) Protect the truth. We can’t properly love people if we don’t also love the truth. that’s why we must protect the truth and stand against the greatest harm to the Christian community which is the undermining of God’s Word. And we can only protect it if we know the Word of God.
- 3) Be continuously thankful for what God has done for you and for me. He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He’s called us as ones who were headed for the put, now to have a trajectory that leads to heaven. He saved us. To be continuously thankful for that.

Some of you may have read John Stott, and if you haven’t, you need to start reading John Stott. He’s been such a prolific writer in this last century. In fact, he was one of the key people who put together the Lausanne mandate early on. The last book he wrote is called ‘The Radical Disciple’. In this book, he says: “To follow Jesus is to let Jesus direct the agenda for our lives. We don’t set the parameters of His Lordship or avoid the cause of our commitment. He calls and we follow.” Very simple.

And then he writes in the beginning. “My concern in this book, is that we who claim to be disciples of the Lord Jesus, will provoke Him to say again, because of the way we are not being disciples, that we will hear Jesus say “Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say?” Because the implication when you call somebody Lord is that you’re willing to obey, and when you don’t, it’s nothing but lip service. For genuine discipleship is wholehearted discipleship.

And then he says, “A common way of avoiding radical discipleship is to be selective, choosing those areas in which commitment suits us, and staying away from those areas in which it will be costly.” This is the point where all of us begin to have deadpan looks, because this is the place where we all

do exactly that. We actually put barbed wire around the area that belongs to us and we say, "Lord, thus far and no further. I will follow You except in this area." And yet, the call for us is where He calls; we follow whether it's complicated, whether it is inconvenient or not.

C.S. Lewis says, "At one point, I was doing my devotions, and I read out a line that went like this: That I might so pass through things temporal, that I finally lose not the things that are eternal. So I will put away things that are temporal so that I will not lose the things that are eternal." He says, "While I prayed, I actually said to pass through things eternal that I might lose not the things that are temporal. I automatically switched it. I realized that I was praying to keep those temporal things because the flesh was so strongly involved in those things that I want to keep, that I will not allow God to come and be a part of it. I was willing to give up the eternal for the temporal." He preaches this in a sermon entitled "The Slip of the Tongue!"

But he says, "This is my oldest nemesis, namely the desire for limited liabilities manifested in that persistent voice in my head that told me to be careful to keep my head, not to go too far. Not to burn my boats." You know what he was saying? He puts this in his own language and he says, "I come into the presence of God with a great fear, lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient when I have come out again into ordinary life." In other words, if you have come into His presence today and God is calling you, speaking to you, telling you, pointing out areas in your life that He wants you to give to Him, there's another voice that is the voice of Satan saying, "Be careful. Don't go too far into this presence of God, because when you go out of this door and you face the challenges outside, you will realize that you give too much inside the door and you won't be able to keep it."

Brilliant argument, except that it is a lie from the pit of Hell. Because the things that God asks us to do are empowered by His Holy Spirit. That's what makes a difference. In and of yourself, you will fail, as Satan knows you will without the Holy Spirit. But with the Holy Spirit, you can come into this fullness and say, "Lord, with your power, and where my weakness comes in, Your strength will be made perfect. I will yield completely. I will submit fully."

So that's the challenge for us today as we set off on this journey of authentic discipleship. The starting point has to be complete surrender. It cannot be that we have a barbed wire fence within our lives. we need to put that away.

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give.

Freely! That's the position that I believe God wants from us today. Authentic discipleship starts with complete submission to God. Now the ball is in your court and mine.

Amen.

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