

"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

"And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this."
Esther 4:14.

God called to Esther through Mordecai. At first she faltered, made excuse, and said, "I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." Mordecai replied, "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this." He wanted to impress Esther with a due sense of her responsibility. She was not an ordinary individual, but a queen; she was allied to a man who swayed the destinies of nations; her position invested her with boundless power for good or evil. The time had come when she must either act in a manner becoming her resources, must use the opportunities at her disposal to save her people, or incur the guilt of neglecting her duty at the most momentous crisis.

It was a time of great crisis and trial for the people of Israel. It was a time that tested the sincerity of the affection of Esther for Mordecai, as well as it tested the sincerity of her love for her nation. It was a time that displayed her trust in God. In spite of the danger of the undertaking and the disagreeableness of the task, she accepted the duty, not knowing what the consequences might be. Thus, in her case, possibility became responsibility, and opportunity became obligation. And from it there arose a halo of challenge and romance because of the uncertainty and possibility of the situation.

"Who knows?" Thus we have the challenge of the uncertain and the lure of the unknown. Who knows? These are words of mysterious suggestion and magic leading. These are especially the words of youth and for youth. Who knows what possibilities are hidden in your young lives?

God's challenge to His people today is compelling and irresistible. Men have challenged men; institutions have challenged institutions; nations have challenged nations; but earth's loudest, clearest, and most clarion challenge is God's challenge to His people.

I. The Challenge.

1. He Challenges Through His Word.

His Word is the most vital, essential, fundamental, needed, and longed-for message in the universe. Warriors have sent out messages burning with patriotism; statesmen have spoken messages vital to the progress and best interests of their nation; orators have soared on eagles' wings; but none of these have the compulsion, magnetism, and imperativeness that God's Word has. His words are alive; they pulsate, throb, burn, and compel attention.

2. He Challenges Through His Works.

Man has been very busy in the world. He has wrought great and marvelous things. He has spanned the oceans, belted the earth, ribboned the nations with railroads and highways, annihilated distance, harnessed the air waves, bridled the lightning, and caused nature to serve him in a thousand ways. But his achievements are as a molehill by the side of a mountain when compared to the works of God. God came in the person of His Son to this cold, cruel, mocking, scoffing world. He went up and down the land performing miracles and saving the lost. He worked and walked, talked and taught, prayed and preached, cried and died for a world that was lost. His works challenge.

3. He Challenges Through His Wounds.

"He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."
"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." His

wounds constitute a trumpet-tongued challenge for each of us. God help us to tell the story of His wounds, for this is what the world needs.

II. The Call.

1. For Courage.

It is not always easy to answer and to obey God's challenge. It was not easy for Esther. She had to fan the furnace of her courage. When she did so, she declared, "And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." She was transformed from a wavering, hesitating, halting, fearful, lukewarm child of God into a bold, fearless, zealous, courageous, conquering heroine. What courage she manifested in comparison with the easy-going, pleasure-loving manner of life. Courage is needed today. Anyone may be willing to follow so long as the heavens are calm and the pathway is smooth, but the real test comes when the storm breaks and the pathway winds up a rugged mountainside.

2. For Character.

Character weighs more than heredity, education, money, or position. God is calling for men and women with character. He places far more emphasis on being than on doing. Marshall Field built up his great business on character. He was a poor farmer boy, who started in a small business, which became the greatest mercantile business in the world. When he began, he did so with character, but no capital. It was his ambition to sell goods for the smallest possible profits. If one of his clerks misled a customer, he was discharged. Customers flocked to his place of business, knowing that they would get a square deal, for he had character. God calls for unquestioned and irreproachable character.

3. For Compassion.

Jesus, seeing the multitudes, misled and unled, was filled with compassion. One of the present-day dangers is the paralysis of compassion. We get so accustomed to horrors, to slaughters, to crippling of men and women, that our peril is that we cease to feel these things at all. The secret of compassion is very simple. It means suffering with people. Whatever progress has been made toward a better world has come through the awakening of compassion. It will help us to be compassionate if we remember that our only hope is the compassion of God.

4. For Communion.

God calls us to be praying people. We have as our weapon in the combat of life and in facing the problems and opportunities of life, prayer. Prayer, which, in the days of Abraham, held back for a while God's hands from scattering fire over Sodom and Gomorrah. Prayer, which, in the days of Joshua, reached up and caught hold of the red bit of the sun and stopped it in mid-heaven. Prayer, which, in the days of Elijah, blew every cloud from the skies. Prayer, which, in the days of Daniel, walked the earth as a lion-tamer. Prayer, which, in the days of the Apostles, opened prison bars. Prayer, which, in the days of many adversaries, enabled Paul, when put in jail, to come out of the prison with a jail door under one arm and a convert under the other.

We should be wise enough to believe that the world needs God more than it needs guns, needs Christ more than it needs cannons, needs the Bible more than it needs bombs, needs truth more than it needs tanks, needs the gospel more than it needs grenades, and needs prayer more than it needs powder. We need the kind of praying that Daniel did, that shook from stem to stern the Babylonian empire; the kind that Nehemiah did when he had rulers running after him with men, money, and materials to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; or the kind of prayer that the widow prayed until the judge had to arise from the bench, postpone business for the time being, and attend to her urgent pleadings.

You can pray for any need -- for lengthened life, as Hezekiah did; for help, as Daniel did; for light, as Bartimaeus did; for mercy, as David did; for rain, as Elijah did; for a son, as Hannah did; for grace, as Paul did. You can pray anywhere -- in the deep, like Jonah; on the sea or a house top, like Peter; on your bed, like Hezekiah; on the mountain, like Jesus; in the wilderness, like Hagar; in the street, like Jairus; in a cave, like David; on a cross, like the dying robber. You can pray any time -- in the morning, as David did; at noon, as Daniel did; at midnight, as Paul and Silas did; in childhood, as Samuel did; in youth, as Timothy did; in manhood, as the centurion did; in age, as Simeon did; in sickness, as Job did; or in death, as did Jacob and the dying Christ.

5. For Consecration.

Esther gave herself wholly to the task. God cannot use those who are not consecrated. He can make a marvelous use of all those who are consecrated.

Christ's compassion and love kept his face set like a flint down the road environed with the horror of false accusations and blocked by a bloody cross. Christ-like compassion will help us to see that crucifixion is the price of consecration, and that we bless when we bleed. What hope do we have if, absorbed in the delights of scholarship, we let the fires go out on evangelistic altars? What hope do we have if, as citizens of a civilization that makes ice in the tropics, we know not how, by the cross, to attack frigid conventionalities with holy, spiritual impetuosity? Or, if, adding telescopes to our eyes and viewing landscapes millions of miles away, we get in scientific fog banks and lose sight of Christ? Or, if, adding radios to our ears, hearing whispers from all corners of the universe, we have dull, deaf, or disobedient ears to the voice of Him who "soundeth forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat"? Or, if, adding the telegraph to our fingers, writing around the world, we are inefficient and blundering in writing the literature of godliness upon the fleshly tablets of human hearts. Or, if, adding the airplane to our bodies, flying swifter and mounting higher than eagles, we are slow in service to God? Of, if, compressing a Caruso into a microscopic point of a needle, hearing dead men sing, we fail to sing the white song of purity into the souls of our youth?

There are many notable examples of the way in which God has used those who are consecrated.

A friend asked Wendell Phillips if he ever dedicated himself to God. He said, "Yes, when I was a boy of fourteen I heard Lyman Beecher preach on the theme, 'You Belong to God,' and I went home and prayed, 'O God, I belong to Thee. Take that which is Thine own.' From that day it has been so."

A man said to Moody, "Some of these times God is going to do marvels with some man who will let Him have full sway in his life." Moody prayed, "O God, let me be that man."

A committee of the Standard Oil Company was in session nearly all night. This committee had the authority and responsibility to find a capable and suitable man to open a business in China. It was agreed that he must be young, educated, and able to speak Chinese. Finally one member said, "I know a man who meets every requirement -- he is now in the very city where we want him to be located." Another member said, "What salary does he get?" "Eight hundred dollars," was the answer. Another said, "There must be something wrong." "No, the difficulty is not with him, but with the people who pay him. He is a missionary." A man was given authority to cross the ocean and offer him \$10,000 and even a larger salary if it was necessary. The missionary declined the salary of \$12,500. The man said, "Well, name your own salary." "Oh, it is not that. The price is big enough, too big. You offer me a big salary for a small job. I have a big job on a small salary. I prefer that." There you have it. That is devotion to a cause; faithfulness to a mission; consecration to the Master.

III. The Time.

His challenge and His call are for today, the day in which we live.

1. For Such a Test as We Face in These Days.

Esther was in a time, place, and environment that were to test and to reveal what she was. Her people were imperiled; their lives were in the balances; their lives were in the balances; their future was dark and uncertain. A hero or a heroine was needed. The testing time had come. She met the test and saved the hour.

This is the testing time. Christianity is being tested as never before. How are we going to respond? There is no time for supineness, idleness, procrastination, or cowardliness. One test is, Will you use or abuse your opportunity? Another test is your ability to say "yes" and "no" when to do so may be hard, but right.

Years ago, in a Massachusetts town, someone said to Henry Wilson, "Henry, you ought to go to school." He replied, "I have no chance." A friend said, "Go join the Sons of Temperance, be sober yourself, and make a man." He took the advice and, year by year, grew. In his young-manhood, he was entrusted with a message to President Adams in Washington. President Adams knew that this young man's father was a terrible drunkard; and for this reason, he treated him with great consideration. He said, "I desire that you shall meet some of the great men of the nation, and tomorrow you shall dine with me and them." When they went to the table, wine was on it. Adams assayed to drink with Henry. A blush mantled his cheeks; and in a manly way, he said, "Mr. Adams, you will please excuse me, Sir; I have a vow that prevents my taking wine." Adams put his glass on the table and said, "There will be no wine drunk at this table today." Every glass was pushed to the center of the table. Henry might have said, "I cannot set the customs for these men." Instead he said, "I do not propose to let the customs of the great destroy my vow." He said "no" so loud that the Senate, Congress, the press, and the world heard it; and later he became Vice-President. How admirable, stalwart, and grand are the young and old who can stand in the face of wrong practices and customs and say, "No."

2. For Such a Task as We Face in These Days.

God challenges us to match the opportunities that He has spread out before us. He has wonderfully blessed America-- He has piled up the mountains, rolled out the plains, dug the channels for the rivers, imbedded her oceans, planted trees, entwined vines, scattered flowers, and made the land the spiritual Goshen of the world. We dare not fail now. Our task is to win lost souls to Christ and teach and train them for Him. In spite of difficulties, disappointments, and discouragements, we are making progress. More people are being won to Christ and church membership and Christian service than ever before.