

**Faith Evangelical Free Church**  
**Esther 4; Desperation and Invitation**  
**Sunday, July 3, 2016**

A few days ago I read a blog post that absolutely melted my heart.

Apparently in Paris, France a 10 year old girl named Eva was so desperate to make her city a better, happier place that decided it was time for her to take action.

Now, there were probably any number of things Eva could have done to try and bring some cheer to her neighborhood -- cleaned garbage from the streets, bake cookies for her neighbors, or maybe even help organize a community party for everyone to get together and enjoy one another's company.

But Eva, as it turns out, is not your average 10-year-old. She made a plan that was a little bigger and a little bolder than anyone could have expected.

Eva got online and did some research. After awhile she found and applied for a summer internship designed to bring 20 of the brightest young minds from around the world together for 2 weeks and give them the "funding, tools, space, and mentorship to start prototyping the change" they wanted to see in the city of Paris.

The blogger, who was one of the people responsible for managing the internship and picking the candidates, summarized Eva's pitch, taken directly from Eva's application, in four simple, heartfelt, and surprisingly inspiring sentences:

*"The streets of Paris are sad. I want to build a robot that will make them happy again. I've already started learning how to code on Thymio robots, but I have trouble making it work. I want to join the program so the mentors can help me."*

The blogger went on to explain that she and her team came upon Eva's application they were shocked, inspired...and realized nothing in their posted description of the internship and its requirements said a 10 year old wasn't allowed to try. Impressed by Eva's courage, humility, and honesty, they sent her the following reply:

*"The answer is yes. You have been selected as one of Paris' first-ever Summer Innovation Fellows among an impressive pool of candidates from all across the world: accomplished urban designers, data scientists and hardware specialists. I love your project and agree that more should be done--through robotics or otherwise--to improve Paris' streets and make them smile again."*

10 year old Eva found herself desperate to make a difference, and in response to her desperation she decided to take bold action (for anyone interested, Eva has her own blog where she posts updates about her progress. I can send you the link).

This summer we've been considering how to rightly respond when we find ourselves in desperate circumstances. Whether our desperation is caused by painful relationships, failing health, destructive habits, our inability to program robots to make our city a better place, or other things beyond our control, over the past few weeks we've seen that Scripture has quite a bit to say about what we can do when life gets hard, hopeless, and seemingly impossible to deal with.

So far we've learned that our first, primary response when we suffer from desperation is to take the proper stance before GOD; we won't experience the grace or the help we need if we're not people of faith -- persistent prayer & able to lament-- people of humility, people who repent -- who genuinely turn from their sins and chart a different course -- and people who experience God directly.

Sometimes doing the difficult work of placing ourselves in the proper stance before God is all we should do -- sometimes it's all we CAN do. But there are other times when the necessary response to our desperate circumstances might be to take bold action. And a great biblical example of just such a time as this comes from the Book of Esther.

Esther's story unfolds like the plot of the next hit television drama. It's got suspense, intrigue, betrayal, conspiracy, and treachery. The cast of characters includes an impetuous king, an orphan girl who becomes queen and saves her people, a great man of God, and of course a murderous villain (about the only thing it's missing to get picked up by FOX is dragons. If only there had been dragons).

There are many wonderful and powerful lessons to be learned from Esther and her story, but this morning I want to focus the ***encouragement it offers for us to consider whether our desperation might be an invitation to take bold action.***

We're going to pick up Esther's story in Chapter 4, but first we need to get caught up on what's happened in Chapters 1-3. This is a broad summary, and if this morning you become intrigued and interested to know more about the Book of Esther, I'd very much encourage to read it throughout this next week.

The story begins with the Persian King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus) getting upset with his queen for refusing to be shown off as an object before a drunken Xerxes and his equally drunken friends, resulting in Xerxes' ill-advised decision to remove her from her position. This leaves Xerxes needing a new queen.

That's where Esther comes in. Esther is a Jewish orphan girl, who was raised by her cousin, Mordecai, living in Persia along with all the other Jews after having been exiled for Israel. King Xerxes demands that all of the most beautiful virgin young women in the Persian Empire be gathered up and brought to his palace for his pleasure. Esther has no choice but to go...and then something rather unbelievable happens: Xerxes picks Esther to be the new queen. Mordecai instructs Esther to keep her Jewish identity a secret, and Esther goes to live in the palace in the capital city of Susa.

So things don't seem so bad...and then we meet a guy named Haman. Haman is the chief advisor, the right-hand-man, to Xerxes. His ego is HUGE. He gets Xerxes issue a decree that all must bow before Haman.

Mordecai, who works as a civic leader at the king's gate, refuses to bow to Haman, on account of his Jewish heritage and beliefs -- Jews bow only to God. This really irks Haman, who in response to Mordecai's refusal has one of history's all-time overreactions, manipulating the king through half-truths and a big bribe into allowing Haman to create a royal decree calling for the empire-wide extermination of every single Jew.

We rejoin the story as Mordecai learns of Haman's terrible plan. Beginning at Esther 4:1 we read,

*[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. [2] He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. [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.*

Mordecai and the rest of the Jews in the Persian Empire are absolutely devastated when they hear the news of Haman's murderous plot, and in the midst of their devastation and desperation, they do exactly what we've learned we're to do over the past few weeks -- they put themselves in the right stance before God.

Now, one of the tricky things about studying the book of Esther is that the name of God is never mentioned, and yet the hand of God is ever present. Unlike other major biblical figures, no great prayer or desperate plea to God from Mordecai or Esther is recorded...nevertheless, the author would have assumed that his original Jewish audience would understand the meaning behind Mordecai and Esther's pious actions (such as lament and fasting) and the will of God having brought Esther into her position, with Mordecai to advise her, at this point in history.

Mordecai rips his clothes and dresses himself in sackcloth and ashes -- and outward display of his inner turmoil and desperation. He and all the others Jews in the Persian provinces fast and weep and lament...all of which, in a Jewish context, would have been understood as them crying out to God and seeking his help.

So every Jew in Persia is in mourning...every Jew except for Esther. As we'll see in the text, her position and responsibilities in the palace (which were basically to remain beautiful and keep Xerxes happy) had kept her from hearing about the king's most recent decree.

Continuing in our text, at Esther 4:4 we read,

*[4] When Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. [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.*

Esther, concerned for the well-being of her parental cousin, sends him some new clothes and tries to find out what has happened to have caused him so much grief. The response she receives from Mordecai draws her in and makes her a part of the desperate situation at hand.

*[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. [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."*

Can you think of a time in your life when your circumstances were already difficult, already strenuous...and then something happens that drags you into full-on desperation?

Try to remember how you felt in that moment...that's what Esther must have felt when the servant brought her Mordecai's message.

She'd been an orphan and an exile; she'd been taken from her home and forced to live to satisfy Xerxes' pleasures.

She'd been made queen without any regard as to her feelings on the matter, and she knew that the position came with little or no real power -- remember, Xerxes had already gotten rid of his previous queen for standing up for herself.

She was married to the most powerful man in the world, but could not trust him nor safely ask him for help.

She feared for her life, she feared for the life of the only family member she had, scared that if she tried to do something bad things would happen and scared that if she did nothing, bad things would still happen.

Esther's hesitancy and doubt are understandable. I want to briefly pause and make a simple yet powerful point.

At the end of Esther's story she becomes the savior of her people -- she overcomes this moment of fear. But the moment shouldn't be ignored, and it shouldn't be belittled. God will end up using Esther even though she had a moment of doubt. **The point is this: when things are desperate, it's okay to be afraid. Fear and doubt do not disqualify or discredit your faith.**

As we'll see in the next passage, there is a way to move past and act within our moments of fear and uncertainty, but if you're here this morning and you're struggling through your desperation with some hesitancy, unsure as how to move forward, know this: you're not alone and God understands your fear. He wants you to be free of it, but he is patient, and will not cast you aside or abandon you because of it.

The love of God made perfect for us in his son Jesus Christ is so good that it can listen to the cry (seen in Mark 9), "*I believe -- help me with my unbelief*" and understand it not as cowardly weakness, but instead as a vulnerable confession. God will be patient with in you in your times of uncertainty, and will not abandon you. He most certainly did not abandon Mordecai, Esther, or the Jews living in Persia.

Getting back into the text, we read:

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

There is a lot that could be said of and learned from this passage. I want to affirm your freedom to have the Holy Spirit use it this morning to speak to you in whatever way best fits your circumstances. I, however, will be focusing on Mordecai's two statements that I believe were meant as an encouragement to Esther to **remember who God is and how God works**.

In Verse 14, Mordecai tells Esther that even if she doesn't choose to act, "*relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place*". Mordecai's conviction that the Jews will be saved, one way or another, speaks the truth that God had a standing, unbreakable, covenantal promise to protect and save his beloved chosen people.

Mordecai is trying to help Esther remember that the God they worship, the God Mordecai and the Jews were crying out to for help, is a God of salvation, a God of deliverance, and a God who never has and never will fail to keep his promises.

What was true for Mordecai and Esther is true for us -- in our moments of desperation, if we're to understand if God's trying to call us into bold action, we must first remember that our God has not only promised to save us, but has already accomplished our salvation by sending his son Jesus to die for us on the cross and forgive our sins.

Not only does Mordecai remind Esther of who God is, but also of how God works.

As part of God's plan and by the power of his strength and grace, God chooses to use human beings to advance his purposes in the world. When Mordecai tells Esther "*who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" he's drawing upon the impressive record of God's using people to accomplish great things.

When Joseph was beaten by his brothers and sold into slavery, God used those circumstances to allow Joseph to find his way into a position to later save his family and turn what was intended for evil into something good.

When God's people were suffering in Egypt he chose to work through Moses and lead his people out of slavery into independence.

David was literally the last person anyone would have thought could become a king, and God used him to bring Israel great prosperity and, despite his flaws and sins, is remembered as a man after God's own heart.

And now Esther, the unlikely Jewish orphan girl who became queen of a pagan land, finds herself in the just the right place at the right time for God to use her to save his people.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul affirmed the same truths as Mordecai -- that our God is a God who saves, and often he works through us -- when he wrote in Romans 8

*[31] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*

*[37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-36; 37-39 ESV)*

Our God is a God who keeps his promises and saves his people.

Our God is a God who often accomplishes his plans through people like you and me -- he invites us to participate in his purposes, even in our most desperate moments.

Remembering who God is and how God works was apparently enough to move Esther from her despair, hesitancy, and doubt and into action. In Verse 15 she commands Mordecai (notice Esther

is now doing the commanding!) to have all the Jews in the capital city of Susa to fast for three days, as she and her servants will do also.

Again, even though prayer and crying out to God is not mentioned or specifically described, it is assumed to be happening -- Esther is getting herself into the right stance before God, praying and fasting, in order that she might be able to understand how her desperation might be an invitation for bold action.

And my goodness, Esther most certainly begins to take bold action! One of the most fascinating things about this book is Esther's transformation from a powerless orphan girl who is pushed around by everyone into the Queen of an Empire, put in place by God in order to save his people.

In Chapter 5, Esther dresses herself in the royal robes and boldly goes before King Xerxes, accepting the risk to her life such an action would create. She finds favor before Xerxes (again, there's God's protection working in the background!) boldly initiates her plan to expose Haman as a villainous murderer who has unknowingly called for the death of Xerxes own Queen.

Throughout Chapters 5-7 we see Esther patiently and skillfully navigate her desperate situation until she finally reveals her Jewish identity and Haman's plot against her and her people to the king, who becomes enraged and orders Haman to be executed. The Book of Esther concludes with Esther securing the right for her people to defend themselves against those Haman had raised to kill them, and Esther becomes a queen worthy of the title -- she secures land, writes laws, and protects her people.

Esther was able to consider whether her desperation was an invitation to take bold action. After remembering who God is and how God works-- that he is a God who saves and that he often graciously works through human beings -- she found the strength to rely upon God's plan and take on her desperate situation.

This morning, I'd ask you to consider this: how might Esther's story be your story as well? ***What possible bold action might God be asking you to take, extending the invitation through your desperation?***

Perhaps you have a friend or a loved one who is plagued by destructive habits, and you've been praying for God to deliver him. That prayer is good and you must continue to pray...but maybe you could also be the one that sets up a meeting with him and speaks words of truth into his life.

Maybe God has placed you in your friend's life in order to call them out of their darkness and into Christ's light.

Or maybe you desperately wish to be a part of seeing people in other cultures or from other nations come to Christ. Again, pray for all these people...but maybe you could also take bold action and meet some of the international students on K-State's campus. Maybe you could help with Bridges International, go to one of the World Friendship meetings and create friendship with women from countries all around the world, or maybe you need to start considering whether God might be calling you to be an international missionary.

It is also possible that in your particular desperate situation, the boldest thing you can do is to keep praying, keep lamenting, keep carrying your worries before God, even when it's really, really hard to do so. Remember, action is not a required step -- it's something you do when prompted by God. And who knows, maybe your desperate situation will be another believer's opportunity for bold action to come alongside you in your pain and your hurt and share with you the love of Jesus.

The Book of Esther encourages us to consider whether our desperation might be an invitation to take bold action. Who knows...perhaps God has brought you into your present situation for such as time as this. Remember who God is, how God works, and take comfort and find courage in his love and protection for you.