

## **DAY 1**

### **SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 1:25-27**

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”

### **OBSERVATION**

Paul is reminding the church at Corinth of both the calling they have on their lives to share Christ with the world and the sad situation they were in before they came to faith in Jesus. This week’s sermon allowed us to take a look at the life of Esther. One interesting thing to note about the book of Esther is that God is not directly mentioned once in the entire book. Scholars call this the theology of apparent absence. As John MacArthur notes, “...the silence is so obvious that it becomes an argument. Esther challenges the tendency to demand that God prove His power and presence. Must God be apparent? All too quickly we expect God to demonstrate in unmistakable ways His identity. Yet God has repeatedly resisted human ultimatums. God reveals Himself for His own purposes, not human requirements.... Esther comes close to revealing God’s standard procedure. God’s fingerprints are all over Esther’s story. His superficial absence points to a deeper presence. God chose to be subtle, but He was there. The events in Esther give us a model for hope when God works in less than obvious ways in our lives.” The book of Esther and the apostle Paul are reminding us of the same thing. God chooses the foolish things. God chooses the weak things. God decides. God acts.

### **APPLICATION**

We are not responsible for how the whole thing turns out, but we are responsible to do what we are supposed to do. God sees things in us that we don’t see in ourselves: a person who is where they are for an urgent missional reason. As New Testament believers we can easily get side tracked and lose sight of our ultimate purpose in Christ, especially when God has not “shown up” in the way we expected or otherwise met our ultimatums. Esther and today’s passage both serve as reminders that God is present and at work, even when life doesn’t make sense.

How have I been sidetracked from the mission God has for me when God did not act as I expected? What reminders has God shown this week that He is in control, that He is faithful, and/or that He has not forgotten me? What can I do to more readily recognize God’s work and avoid being sidetracked (keep a journal, make a gratitude list, make a point to share my story with another)?

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank you for resisting my ultimatums. Please give me eyes to see your less-than-obvious ways. Help me to be faithful to what you have called me to, even when I don’t understand how you are working or what you see in me. Help me to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and by your wisdom, not the world’s knowledge.

## DAY 2

### SCRIPTURE: PROVERBS 3:27-28

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back tomorrow and I’ll give it to you” - when you already have it with you.”

### OBSERVATION

As we observed in Day 1, Esther is the only book of the Bible in which God is not directly mentioned one time. However, there are many hints and whispers of His presence. One of the most overt is found in Chapter 4. Haman’s plot against the Jews is unfolding and Mordecai is imploring Esther to act. Esther, in perfectly well-founded fear of her life, is wavering. In Chapter 4, verse 14, Mordecai says, “*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 your royal position for such a time as this?*” Mordecai is making a profound statement of his unwavering faith that God will sovereignly keep his covenant with Abraham and with David, whether Esther chooses to act or not. Esther faces a choice regarding her power to act, and act quickly, for the cause of good.

### APPLICATION

We will not often find ourselves in a position to act with immediate consequences as dire as those Esther was facing. However, God has also placed each one of us in our homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces “for such a time as this.” While procrastinating on seemingly unimportant things can be harmless, we can also procrastinate when it comes to infinitely important things like sharing Christ with our family, friends, and neighbors. We must remember that God will not force our destiny upon us. He *will* fulfill Christ’s destiny without me, but He will not fulfill my destiny without me.

**How can I recognize my “such a time” in the places in which God has planted me? Who are “my people” (Esther 8:6) in my life that are in need of deliverance? What good do I have the opportunity to share with “my people” that I am not sharing because of fear? Will I allow God to fulfill His destiny *for me* by surrendering to how He wishes to fulfill Christ’s destiny *through me*? Will I open my eyes to the potential God sees in me? Where do I have the power to act today?**

### PRAYER

Lord, help my eyes to be open to the people around me with fresh awareness that You have placed me here for such a time as this. Help me to see people as You see them, to act, and to grant grace and good to them. Holy Spirit, when I have opportunity, but am procrastinating, please call to my mind the words of James 4:17, “whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” Help me to honor You and be an active participant in the way You wish to fulfill my destiny.

## **DAY 3**

### **SCRIPTURE: ACTS 17:26**

“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.”

### **OBSERVATION**

Today’s verse comes to us courtesy of Paul’s famous speech to the Athenians in the meeting of the Areopagus. Verse 21 tells us “*All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.*” (Sound familiar? Twitter, Facebook, blogging, anyone?) Paul, upon noticing the Athenians altar erected “to an unknown God,” begins to tell them about The One True God. It is in this context that verse 26 is spoken. Paul understands that His audience can more readily comprehend God when they understand that God has been very intentional toward them ... that He has appointed their times and boundaries. Paul goes on to say, “*God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.*” Just as Esther found herself appointed “for such a time as this,” we have had our times appointed and our boundaries outlined by a sovereign God. And God has done this so that we would seek Him, though He is not far.

### **APPLICATION**

People often talk about those who are innovative as “born before their time.” Similarly, we refer to those with a more classical perspective as “an old soul.” Most of us seem to have awareness that our times have been appointed, and we either bemoan it (I would have loved to have worn those clothes...) or we celebrate it (Thank goodness, I live in a time of air conditioning!) What we probably think about less is that our boundaries have also been appointed by our Creator. Psalm 16:6 says, “*The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.*”

**How readily do I recognize the times and boundaries that God has appointed for my life, take comfort in His near presence, and live up to His high calling? In what way does this reminder of how personal God’s intentions are toward me encourage me as I join Him on His urgent rescue mission? How does knowing that God appointed my times and boundaries help me to better trust what He says He sees in me?**

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You that You have set Your love on me (Psalm 91:14) and have specifically set me in this time and this place (Psalm 139). Forgive me when I do not recognize Your boundaries as for my good. Thank You for allowing me to participate in Your mission to help those who are searching for an unknown God by pointing them to You, a God who is near and who wants to be known ... a God who sets us in times and places so that we seek You, reach for You, and find You. Lord, we are asking You to use us in Your rescue mission, knowing it will be given; we are seeking You, knowing we will find; we are knocking, knowing that the door will be opened because you are near (Matthew 7:7, Acts 17:27).

## **DAY 4**

### **SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-2**

“As God’s co-workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”

### **OBSERVATION**

Throughout this week, we have seen how God chooses sometimes less-than-obvious ways to use seemingly less-than-equipped people to participate in His mission, by bringing those who search for an unknown God to knowledge of the God who is very near. We have seen that, while He may choose to be subtle or even appear to be silent, God is very intentional in how He chooses to act, to the point of setting individual people in specific times in history and even with specific limitations. We are not just expected to be casual observers of God’s redemptive activity in this world, we are co-workers or laborers. Why? Because those who have been redeemed are perfect carriers of His message! As Christ-followers we must be very careful to not forget how amazing God’s grace is. Our proper worship response to grace is sharing it with everyone we encounter. Now. Today.

### **APPLICATION**

Sometimes, we can be a forgetful people; failing to recall just how much we did need/do need/will need grace. Hebrews 7:11 reminds us, *“If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood--and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood--why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?”* Perfection has never been attainable by mortal man. Because of Jesus’ perfection, we are free from failing to attain perfection and free from the disappointment wrought when those around us fail to attain. When we “receive God’s grace in vain,” we shackle ourselves and everyone we know with an incredible burden that no one can bear. Other times, we “receive God’s grace in vain” when we allow fear of the unknown to paralyze us. We walk in grace when we remember that God gives grace for each day according to our need, not our imagination.

**To whom do I need to grant grace by letting them off the hook for how they have failed me? How do I need to grant that same grace to myself? How can I better recognize that my anxieties are the calling card of my self-sufficiency, so that I can trust in the power of Christ as I share the gift of the good news about grace with my people?**

### **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to “boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Help me, every day, to see the gift of grace that you did give/are giving/will give to me so that I will not receive it in vain, but will invest it in those around me. Help me to remember that the mission is urgent, that this is the time of Your favor, that today is the day of salvation.

## **DAY 5**

### **SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 2:10**

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

### **OBSERVATION**

Another translation for handiwork is masterpiece. God is a phenomenal artist who uses every setback and victory as a brush stroke in the canvas of our lives. The story of Esther has illustrated this for us through the narrative, but God did not stop with the story as a display of his handiwork. The book of Esther further illustrates God’s artistry through its very literary form. Esther employs a Hebrew literary device, called chiasmic structure, in which events mirror each other inversely. An example of this structure would be JFK’s famous quote, “Ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country.” Chiasmic structure starts with a set of knowns or expectations and inverts them. Esther also makes use of a literary device known as peripety, a reversal of circumstances, or sudden turn of events. In Esther, we see a turn-around from hard times marked by threat and fear to happy times filled with deliverance and praise. Esther opens on the scene of a feast that was designed, at least in part, to coerce support for a conqueror with an eye on Greece (i.e. and insatiable appetite for power). The story closes on a feast still recognized to this day (Purim) which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews. Both in the words of the story and the very way those words are written, the book of Esther shows that God can be trusted to work all things together for good. That’s the kind of masterpiece He is capable of - that He creates every. single. day. That’s the kind of masterpiece He wants to work in us... not just through the story, not just through the details of the story ... but through the very way the story unfolds. Knowing that God doesn't waste a word or an opportunity, we need to lean into the plan He has for our lives to impact those around us.

### **APPLICATION**

This week, we have examined some New Testament principles in light of the story of Esther. We will all face seasons of difficulty or pain. (Do you hear Pastor Mike asking the difference between those who are facing a difficult season and those who are not? That’s right. Two weeks.) Esther encourages us to remember that, whether seen or unseen, God is always present. When life doesn’t make sense, we have a choice to turn away from God or turn to Him, recognizing His grace in the moment, and remaining on His mission.

Where is God asking me to trust Him, even though I do not see what He is doing? What good work has God spotlighted this week that He wants me to complete? How can I cooperate with what God sees in me?

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for showing us that You are always at work, weaving events for Your glory. Help me to trust You and watch for Your fingerprints, even when I don’t see You. Help me to obey Your calling to mission, sharing the grace that is working a masterpiece out of me. Thank You, Lord, for what You allow me to see in You and for what You see in me.