



MOMENTS TO PONDER

ESTHER

Episode 72: For Such a Time (Esther 4)

Hey Friends, welcome to Moments to Ponder, this a podcast designed to help you spend a few moments in God's Word and take away something to ponder.

I'm Betsy Marvin and I'm grateful for the few moments we have together to ponder the book of Esther. This is episode 72.

As we pick up our story in Esther, we find the Jews in the city of Susa in dealing with the decree of the King.

When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. ² He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. ³ And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

Burlap, or sackcloth as some translations say, and ashes were a way to show mourning, repentance or abasement. The coarse material, the dark ashes, and the dust would be an outward sign of the turmoil within. If someone saw you, they would immediately understand the deep grief bringing understanding to your situation.

All over the city, people were weeping and wailing, it would have been truly heart-breaking to see so many people in deep grief – wailing and crying together. The people also fasted which implies prayer for the rescue they needed from God.

The verses mention that Mordecai wasn't allowed to enter the palace area in his mourning clothes. The King didn't allow anything like this to enter his palace – he kept the sadness out – which I find interesting. He lived in his little bubble, he may have not even realized the chaos that came from his decree.

The story continues...

⁴When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused

it. ⁵ Then Esther sent for Hathach (hātāk), one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. ⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

Just a note – Esther, because she lived in the palace, also no idea what was going on in the city. When she hears of Mordecai, she sends him clothes not realizing why he is in mourning.

⁷ Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. ⁹ So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

¹⁰ Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: ¹¹ "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." ¹² So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

We learn a few things from this – Esther's life in the palace didn't mean she saw the King every day. She had to be summoned like anyone else into the King's presence or she could be sentenced to death. Can you imagine not being able to go into your spouses' presence without being summoned? It had been a month since she has seen him, and she isn't so sure he'll extend the scepter, I wonder if she was beginning to think his feelings for her had faded.

¹³ Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. ¹⁴ 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?"

Mordecai is pleading for the lives of Esther, his family, and for all his people. He says it straight – he knows that God will save his people (He always has) – but it might not include them. He reminds her that God's plan is bigger than our roles in it, but what if you are queen for this moment, put in place for such a time as this?

This line always hits me – it is a truth that still applies today. What if God has created an opportunity that he has put in place just for me, and I don't step into

it? The obvious answer is, I'll miss the opportunity. It might not cost me my life, but it could have a costly consequence. What about you?

Has God asked you to do something hard?

Will you let it pass you by or step into his work?

We continue in verse 15:

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther 4

Although the passage doesn't mention prayer specifically, I'm sure that Esther was praying as she fasted. The entire city was fasting and praying for her. We can see from her words that the decision had been made to go in to the King, the fasting was her preparation, placing herself in God's hands. Praying for courage and strength to accept whatever God's plan was for her in that moment.

Have you ever fasted over a decision or need in your life?

Today, intermittent fasting is a diet plan, but spiritual fasting is the practice of going without food while focusing in prayer. It is a tangible way to live out the verse in Luk 3 9:23 – "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Fasting is a sacrificial act that uses the physical act of denying ourselves food as a discipline to say – God, it's all about you. Each time the pang of hunger strikes it is a reminder to pray, lean on God, and seek his counsel. The restraint involved in not eating but going to God in prayer, brings a discipline that leaks into other areas of our lives as we rely on God more fully for strength.

I think, for me, fasting is my way of saying, I am serious about this need and I'm willing to sacrifice food in order to deny myself and follow Christ as I bring my requests before him. I have fasted many times for different decisions or needs and I have found that the practice brings a clarity and heightens my awareness in prayer as I bring my requests to him. My prayers have been answered with both yeses and nos, but each time I knew my heart was aligned to accept his will – whatever it was.

There are many ways to practice our faith, fasting is just one. These practices are often called spiritual disciplines, I've also heard them referred to as soul training - which I really like. Training is a learning process, a way to grow and develop and there are

ways that we can train our souls to lean into God and develop our relationship with him. In our next episode, we'll dive into the soul training of prayer as we continue Esther's story.

As we ponder today's scripture, is there something in your life that you need to fast and pray over? Is there a "such a time as this" moment before you that requires a step?

I encourage you to fast and pray, seeking His direction.

You may not be facing a hard decision or life-changing opportunity, yet each day you are faced with decisions, options. May you seek to train your soul to daily look for ways to honor God with those decisions and choices. May you discover his strength and pathway as you lean into His plans for you.

May you know that He sees you, knows you, and loves you.

Amen.