

I. INTRODUCTION

When we look at history and our own lives, we see that God is sovereign. All things are under His control. But how about our human response? Where does our responsibility fit into the picture? Today's passage will answer the age old question.

BACKGROUND: Read the entire Book of Esther.

II. BIBLE READING

Esther 4:1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. 4 When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. 9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 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 royal position for such a time as this?" 15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. (NIV)

III. DISCUSSION

A. Study on Chapter 4

1. Summarize Chapter 1 to 3. Then read Esther 4:1-17.
2. When Mordecai and the Jews heard that they would be exterminated, what were their reactions? (vv. 1-3)

3. What did Mordecai urge Esther to do? (v. 8)
4. What was Esther's initial reaction? (v. 11) Why do you think she hesitated to do what Mordecai requested? If the main reason for Esther's hesitancy was due to her belief that she would be safe in the palace, in what way is it typical of human nature? Placing yourself in Esther's situation, how would you have reacted? Why?
5. How did Mordecai explained and challenged Esther? (vv. 13-14) What do we learn from Mordecai? **REFLECTION:** How is my faith in God compared with Mordecai's?
6. Was Esther's position as queen an opportunity or responsibility? Explain your answer? How does this apply to "complacent Christians" who refuse to be used by God?
7. How did Esther respond? (v. 16) What is the meaning of Esther's response? Think of the instances in your life wherein you faced tremendous pressures and difficult choices. How did you respond? Why?
8. Summarize the rest of the Book of Esther.

B. God's Sovereignty And Our Human

1. Although God is not mentioned even once in the book, His presence and active involvement are obvious to all. How is God's sovereignty over human affairs evident throughout this episode?
2. Have you seen God's hand in your life? In what ways?
3. Does God's sovereignty in human affairs mean that people no longer have freedom of choice or freedom to decide? What then is our part?
4. What have you learned from today's study?

IV. CONCLUSION

The book reveals the sovereignty of God at work in a particular situation, accomplishing His purposes, but without in any way overriding the free decisions and moral actions of the people involved. Let us learn to accept our human responsibility for moral decisions and moral action, while at the same time acknowledge and appreciate His sovereignty over the world in which we live.