If I Perish, I Perish

Esther 4:1-5:15

Key Verse: 4:16 “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 attendants 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.”

In chapter 2 & 3 we learned how God made Esther queen through the wisdom of Mordecai. God opened the eyes and hearts of all those who saw Esther to see her with favor and to choose her as a queen. We saw God’s providence and divine plan behind Esther’s successful story. God plans before he works and prepares all necessary things to accomplish his plan. In chapter 4 & 5 the story of Esther continues with her personal and national crisis. Let’s see how she dealt with these crises and how God helped her to do so.

First, who knows? (Sense of God’s history) The previous chapter explains the birth of the conflict between Mordecai and Haman which brought a national crisis to all the Jews in the kingdom of Xerxes. Haman, who was highly honored by the king, was very unhappy with Mordecai, who would not kneel down or pay him honor. (3:2) Haman was waiting for an opportunity to remove Mordecai and kill all of the Jews in the kingdom of Xerxes. Haman bought the king’s heart with money and received permission from him to annihilate all the Jews on a single day. There came a national crisis to all the Jews caused by the evil man Haman.

How did Mordecai react in this critical situation? Look at verse 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.***” Tearing one’s clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes is the expression of extreme grief and sorrow. It was not only Mordecai who cried out before God bitterly. Look at verse 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.***” This weekend there was a solo picture exhibition in Wash U about the Jewish survivals in the holocaust during the World War II. The images of the survivors showed their agony and sorrow at that time. All the Jews in the provinces of Persia faced a holocaust not by Hitler, but by Haman. Like Mordecai they wept and wailed with fasting. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes because their fate was like a smoldering wick before a hurricane.

Esther, who lived in the king’s palace at that time, heard the news about Mordecai. She sent her attendants to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. (5) Mordecai told them everything that had happened to him, including Haman’ bribery and the king’s edict for their annihilation. He also asked them to tell Esther to go to the king and to beg for mercy for his people. (8) Esther’s attendants came back to Esther and reported everything which Mordecai explained. Esther sent her letter back to Mordecai. The content of her letter is this. Look at verse 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 they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.***” This was the royal law for the king’s safety at that time. In ancient days there were many assassinations against kings and queens in the inner court by their attendants and even their spouses. So, there was the security law for the king that without permission from the king no one, even his queen, could approach the king. Those who violated this law could be put to death, even his queen. Esther was well aware of this law. She also said that she couldn’t be called by the king for the last 30 days. The king might have forgotten her. Esther meant that it was not the right time to see the king.

How did Mordecai respond to Esther’s letter? Look at verses 12-14. “***When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, 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. 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’s message was simple. “Don’t be selfish but remember God’s grace!’ If Esther became silent at this time, her life alone could be spared, but all her family members would be killed. Mordecai reminded Esther that God made her queen for this very moment—to save her people from the holocaust. Here we learn the sense of God’s history which Mordecai had. Mordecai believed that God made Esther the queen of Persia to rescue his people from the hand of Haman. Mordecai believed that there was nothing by chance or by accident in God’s people. He believed that there was God’s divine plan and preparation in all things and all circumstances. He had watched attentively and prayerfully how God was leading Esther’s life since she was chosen as a queen candidate. He told Esther not to tell her nationality and family background so that she might not have any obstacles and disadvantages to become a queen,

Mordecai was a man of prayer like the servants of Abraham in Genesis 24. Abraham’s servant had prayed before he left to find a wife for Isaac, the son of his master Abraham. The servant prayed when he arrived at the land where Abraham directed. He watched Rebekah carefully and closely to learn whether or not God had made his journey successful, and she was the right woman God provided for Isaac. Both Abraham’s servant and Mordecai feared God. Through prayer they sought God’s wisdom and direction. Like them we need to have the eyes to see all things with the eyes of God’s history. We need eyes to see all things from God’s perspective with his big picture and big plan. Who knows about a young man’s future? No one knew that Joseph in the Old Testament who had been sold as a slave to Egypt became a prime minster of Egypt. Joseph later confessed that God made him a prime minister to save many lives including his family (Ge 50:20). While I was working as an assistant pastor in Chicago UBF for 10 years, I learned how to care for the lawn and to maintain buildings. I mowed, painted, fixed, replaced, and repaired houses and buildings. At that time, I didn’t understand why I had to do such things as an assistant pastor. But now I know that God prepared me to run a rental business as a self-supporting missionary and pastor. For the last 18 years I used my skill and experience to serve the Lord as a self-supporting minister. Yesterday I fixed Michael’s house, too. Is there anyone who became successful from God? Who knows that God will make you successful to help the needy? Is there anyone who has difficulty now? Don’t complain or despair! Who knows that God put you in that situation to make you strong and change your life better in the future? No one knows how God changes your future. So, we must see all things from God’s perspective as Mordecai did. We also must believe that in all things and in all situations, God works for good for those who love him. Amen!

Second, if I perish, I perish. How did Esther respond to Mordecai’s words? Look at verse 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 attendants 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***.” First of all, Esther asked for prayer support for her. She asked all the Jews to pray and fast for her. She also would fast with her attendants. Then, she would stand before the king even though it was against the royal law. She was ready to die for her people. She said, ‘*If I perish, I perish*.’ She meant that if the thing did not go well with her and led her to death, she would not mind. She was willing to sacrifice her life for her people. We are amazed by Esther’s courage and faith.

In human history there are women of courage and faith who risked their lives for their people. Joan of Arc (Joan D'arc) was known as a patron saint of France. She was 17 years old when she risked her life to rescue France from England during the 100 year’s War. Even though she was a woman, she led the French army to defeat the English soldiers. She was 19 years old when she was captured and burnt at stake. Sister Gwansun Ryu in South Korea was a high school girl when she led the movement of independence from Japan in 1919. She had the same spirit and courage as Esther did, “*If I perish, I perish*.” Finally, she was captured by Japanese police and executed. These are Ryu’s last words before she died, “My grief is that I have only one life with me to sacrifice for my people.” At that time, she was only 17 years old.

These three heroic women deserve to be praised and honored, but not worth comparison to Jesus who gave his life for the world. Jesus, though he is God himself, came down to this world as a man. He was born in a manger and suffered from Pilate. The night he was arrested to suffer, he went up to a mountain and prayed, “*Abba, Father. Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*” (Mk 14:36) Jesus could have avoided the cup of cross if he wanted. But he obeyed and submitted himself to the Father’s will. His words ‘*Yet not what I will, but what you will*’ are the same words as ‘*If I perish, I perish*.” Jesus was willing to die for the sins of the world. Jesus said, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*.” (Jn 10:11)

Esther’s word, “*If I perish, I perish*.” is called ‘martyrdom spirit’ or ‘resurrection faith.’ In church history many missionaries left their home and countries and went to other countries to preach the gospel. They obeyed Jesus’ world mission command and went to the world with martyrdom spirit. They thought, “If I perish, I perish. I cannot stay in my comfort zone until God’s will is done. I am not afraid of losing my life if it means the gospel is preached to all nations.’ David Livingston, an English missionary in Africa, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a German missionary in Africa, Jim Elliot, an American missionary in Ecuador, Sarah Barry, an American missionary in Korea, are the heroes and heroines in missionary history. They did not mind losing their lives if only God’s will be done in each mission field. They had martyrdom spirit and resurrection faith. May God raise many sacrificial and fearless missionaries and Bible teachers in this country who go out and preach the word to all nations. Amen!

In chapter 5 Esther put her words into action. She visited the king even though she was not called. It was against the royal law, but it could not stop her because she believed that God made her queen for this moment. How did the king respond to Esther? God opened the heart of the king to accept Esther with favor. He was pleased with Esther and held out to her the gold scepter in his hand, (7:2) which meant that he allowed her to approach him. Esther asked the king with a request that she invite the king and Haman to her banquet the following day. (7-8) Without knowing Esther’s plan, Haman was so happy and boasted about her invitation to his wife and all his friends. He said, “***I am the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave***.” (12) Then, he set up a pole which reached a height of 75 feet to impale Mordecai. (14) But Haman did not know that he was digging his own grave.

People say that our enemies in this generation are selfishness and fear. What they said is partially true. But from Esther’s viewpoint our real enemy is the absence of true object for our devotion. In other words, they lost true and valuable objects which deserve their life devotion. Since they did not find it, they live just for today and for their physical needs. Because of Relativism and Humanism, people lost their true object for their devotion. In the past we had the object which had absolute truth and unchangeable value that is worth for *‘If I perish, I perish*.’ As I mentioned before, there appeared many devoted missionaries who sacrificed their lives for the truth of God. But relativism robbed the absolute truth of God, and humanism deceived people. As a result, people are confused and wandering, even many in campus. Therefore, we must pray for the restoration of the absoluteness of God from this lost generation. We must first devote ourselves for this and pray that God may answer our prayer. There are many young people, even at age of 17 years old, who are willing to give their lives for the truth of God in this generation. Amen!