

The God Who Calls Us to Speak Up

THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD #2 - Pastor Gary Combs - May 3, 2026 – Esther 3-4

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new 6-week sermon series today entitled: THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD: A Study of Esther.

Last week we looked at chapters 1–2 and saw that even when God is not mentioned, He is still working behind the scenes: removing a queen, raising up Esther in her place, and positioning Mordecai at the king's gate. What looked like ordinary events were actually divine appointments.

Now this week in chapters 3–4, the story takes a dark turn. What was quiet providence becomes a public crisis. A wicked man rises to power, and an entire people group is marked for destruction. And in the middle of it all, God begins to call His people, not to comfort, but to courage. He calls them to break their silence and to speak up!

Need: We need this message because there are moments in life when following God will cost us something. Moments when standing for what is right puts us at risk. Moments when silence feels safer than speaking, and compromise feels easier than conviction. And in those moments, God often feels hidden. We wonder: Where is God when evil is advancing? Where is God when the pressure is on? What we need is the courage to trust that even when God seems silent, He is still sovereign and He is calling us to act.

Trans: And that's exactly what we see in Esther chapters 3 and 4. God is not named, but He is not absent. He is working behind the scenes, pressing His people into moments where silence is no longer an option. He is calling them to speak up in faith when fear says to stay quiet.

BODY: In Esther chapters 3 and 4, the narrator recorded how God, though never named, sovereignly worked to call His people to courageously speak up in response to Haman's evil genocidal decree against the Jews of Persia. We can see how God calls us to courageously speak up against evil. How does God call us to courageously speak up against evil? The text gives **three ways** God calls us to courageously speak up against evil.

Text: Esther 3:1-15 (ESV)

1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" 4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. 7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day, and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws; so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasures." 10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you." 12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

THREE WAYS GOD CALLS US TO COURAGEOUSLY SPEAK UP:

1. By positioning us providentially.

EXP: (3:1-15) God allows Haman to rise and Mordecai to refuse. What looks like political tension is actually divine positioning. The stage is being set for a confrontation that will require someone to speak up.

"Haman the Agagite" (3:1) (הַמָּאן, *hāmān*) - name means "magnificent." An Agagite (Amelakite). He is an **"enemy of the Jews" (10)**. It seems likely the Agagite phrase is to inform us why Mordecai the Benjamite (2:5) will not bow, perhaps connected to 1 Samuel 15 where Saul son of Kish, a Benjamite, failed.

"Set his throne above all the officials" (1) (נִשְׂבָּרָה, *nāšārah*) - lifted up, be exalted, promoted. Mordecai saves the King and he gets a mention in the records, but this guy gets the promotion.

"Mordecai did not bow down" (2) - Mordecai would not bow to Haman. Why? The Bible simply doesn't say, but the repeated "Agagite" may tell us why. This Benjamite would not bow before the Agagite.

"Told them that he was a Jew" (4) (יְהוּדִי, *yehūdī*) - The reason Mordecai gives for not bowing.

"Haman was filled with fury" (5) (הֵמָּא, *hēmā*) - heat, rage, hot displeasure, indignation, anger, wrath

"Sought to destroy all the Jews" (6) (שָׁמַד, *šamad*) - to annihilate, exterminate, to destroy.

"They cast Pur" (8) (פּוּר, *pûr*) - "lot" or "piece." Ends up being a special feast among the post-exilic Jews.

"A certain people ... do not keep the king's laws" (8) (שָׁמַר, *šamar*) - to do, to keep. Haman doesn't mention what people he is talking about and the king never asks. This is a careless king.

"Let it be decreed that they be destroyed ... pay 10,000 talents" (9) (כָּתַב, *kātab*) - to write, inscribe, decree. The king makes this decree with little consideration. Only the 750,000 lbs. of silver seem important.

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“**The thirteenth day of the first month**” (12) - This edict is made a day before Passover. The irony is unmistakable, as they celebrate deliverance, they receive a letter declaring their death sentence.

“**The thirteenth day of the twelfth month ... Adar**” (13) - the Jews were notified that they would be exterminated 11 months from the time of the edict. What a piece of mail!

“**The couriers went out hurriedly**” (15) (דָּחֲפוּ, *dāḥapū*) - to drive on, hurry, hasten. “Herodotus calculated that the post would take ninety days.” — Dr. Mervin Breneman, *NAC: Esther*, pg. 332

“**The king and Haman sat down to drink**” (15) (הִתְּשֵׁוּ, *šāṭā*) - to feast, to drink. Drinking buddies.

“**But the city of Susa was thrown into confusion**” (15) (בִּוְרָח, *būṛāḥ*) - to perplex, confuse, be confused.

ARG: We are to be subject to the governing authorities because God put them there.

Romans 13:1 (ESV) Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

We often desire a different assignment, but we are called to bloom where we are planted.

1 Corinthians 7:17 (ESV) Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.

APP: So when you find yourself in a difficult place, don't assume something has gone wrong. God puts us in places where our voice matters. WHEN GOD CALLS, DON'T STAY SILENT. SPEAK UP!”

Text: Esther 4:1-14 (ESV)

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. 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. 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 [a] 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." 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?"

2. By confronting us personally.

EXP: (4:1-14) The crisis moves from national decree to personal responsibility. Mordecai mourns publicly. Esther hears. Mordecai's message to Esther is direct: “Go to the king to beg his favor” (8). When she expressed her fear, he confronts her saying, “You can't “keep silent at this time” ... “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (14).

“**Mordecai tore his clothes ... put on sackcloth and ashes ... cried out**” (4:1) (קָרַע וְשָׂא אֵפֶר, *zā'āq*) - to cry, cry out, call, call for help. Mordecai is crying loudly. Perhaps he feels the weight of it all by his actions.

“**Great mourning among the Jews**” (3) (אֲבֵלוּת, *'ēbēlūt*) - lamentation, mourning: as for the dead.

“**The queen was deeply distressed**” (4) (חֹרָה, *ḥūl*) - fear, pained. Esther is apparently in a sort of royal bubble and was not privy to this death decree going out against her people.

“**Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree**” (8) - Mordecai gets word via her eunuch.

“**Go to the king to beg his favor**” (8) (הִנָּחֵן, *ḥānan*) - to be gracious, show favor, pity; to seek favor.

“**Goes to the king without being called ... put to death**” (11) (מָוֶת, *mūṭ*) - to die, kill, have executed.

“**Not been called ... thirty days**” (11) - Esther is concerned. She obviously fears his rejection.

“**If you keep silent**” (14) (שָׁרֵיט, *ḥāraš*) - to be silent, speechless. “Again the author alluded to a principal theme of the book, that God takes care of His people.” — Breneman, pg. 336.

“**For such a time as this**” (14) - Esther's life purpose is at stake. God has put her in place for this time.

ARG: Scripture makes it clear that when injustice is at stake, God's people are not to remain quiet.

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT) Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

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ILL: In Matthew 14, a great crowd gathered to hear Jesus, but when it was evening “the disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” But Jesus said, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” (Matt. 14:15-16). The disciples saw the need, but Jesus made it personal. Then He, provided for them.

APP: This is not a message calling you to just do more. But there are moments when God makes it clear: this is yours. Not someone else’s responsibility. Not someone else’s voice. Yours. And in those moments, God is confronting us personally, not to overwhelm us, but to awaken us. **WHEN GOD CALLS, DON’T STAY SILENT. SPEAK UP!”**

Text: Esther 4:15-17 (ESV) 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.

3. By challenging us sacrificially.

EXP: (4:15-17) Esther steps forward with a plan shaped by fasting, prayer, and surrender. And then she speaks the words that define courage: “If I perish, I perish.” This is not reckless. It is resolved trust in God.

“**Gather all the Jews ... hold a fast ...for three days**” (16) (צום, *šûm*) - to abstain from food, fast. “Three days” functioned as a full, complete span of time, long enough to be weighty and serious, but not indefinite. This isn’t a casual fast; it’s urgent, total dependence on God in a life-or-death moment.

“**If I perish, I perish.**” (16) (אבד, *’ābad*) - to destroy, kill, cause to perish, to give up (as lost).

ARG: **Christ’s call to discipleship is a sacrificial call. Yet it is a call with a promise of salvation!**

Luke 9:23–24 (ESV) “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

APP: Some of you are right here. You know what God is asking you to say... You know what conversation you need to have... You know what truth you’ve been avoiding... And it feels costly. But courage is not the absence of fear. It is obedience in spite of fear. **WHEN GOD CALLS, DON’T STAY SILENT. SPEAK UP!”**

CONCLUSION: Today, we’ve seen that God calls us to not to remain silent in the face of evil, but to speak up...

1. By positioning us providentially
2. By confronting us personally
3. By challenging us sacrificially

And even when God seems silent, He is still working behind the scenes, preparing moments where His people must choose whether to stay silent or to speak up. So when the pressure rises... when fear whispers... when the moment comes... Remember this: **EVEN WHEN YOU CAN’T SEE IT, GOD IS WORKING.** And because He is working... **WHEN HE CALLS, DON’T STAY SILENT. SPEAK UP!”**

Because we’re in the same position as Esther was...

A decree of death hangs over us that we can’t cancel. It’s not from Mordecai’s refusal to honor Haman, but from our refusal to give honor and glory to the Lord. This decree cannot be cancelled. The wages of sin is death.

Esther’s father Mordecai commanded her to go before the king and after three days of fasting, she obediently risked her life saying, “If I perish, I perish.”

And God sent His only begotten Son, not merely to risk His life, but to obediently lay it down, to perish in our place, so that those who believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

After three days He rose again, having conquered death, not by cancelling the decree, but by satisfying it and taking the punishment we deserved and making a way for us to stand before the King forever.

Jesus wasn’t silent. He spoke, He stood, and He gave His life for us. And now, because of Him, we are called and empowered to speak up in His name. Let’s pray.