

ESTHER 4:1-17

DAINGEROUS SHEEP¹

“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. 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. 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.

“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. 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. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate, 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. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, 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. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, ‘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.’

“And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. 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. 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?’ Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, ‘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.’ Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.”²

The story is told of a corrupt politician who successfully lobbied the head of state to introduce a law endorsing genocide. The targeted victims were essentially voiceless; no one in the halls of power would dare plead their case. It appeared that an entire race would be slaughtered; the people despaired, until one lone woman broke her silence and changed history. For those conversant with the Old Testament accounts, the story is familiar; it is the account provided in the Book of Esther. We should familiarise ourselves with this story, because it is often repeated for God’s people, even in this day.

¹ The concept for the message is an article by John Stonestreet, “Become Dangerous,” Breakpoint, May 11, 2012, <http://links.mkt3980.com/servlet/MailView?ms=NDIwODIyMAS2&r=OTQ0MjI2MTM0S0&j=NDM0MzY2MzgS1&mt=1&rt=0>, accessed 12 May 2012

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I encourage each follower of Christ to familiarise himself or herself with Esther's story. The Book named after this brave woman is the account of God working through one courageous woman. Esther can hardly be considered a paragon of righteousness; and yet, God used her to His glory. That knowledge alone should encourage each Christian. Though we recognise our proclivity toward sin, we also know the grace of God and His power to work in the most hopeless situations. Moreover, we know that He is able to use the poorest example of humanity to the praise of His glory. Even when people oppose the Living God, He works to bring glory to His Name. Demonstrating insight that benefits each one following the Master, the Psalmist has said, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you" [PSALM 76:10a].

One reason to familiarise yourself with the account of Esther's life is because this same storyline—a group of people are victimised by wicked ideas; then, God calls His people to speak up—is repeated over and over again throughout history. The divine call we have received today is the same as that given in the days of Esther. Much of what Christians hold dear—life, marriage and religious freedom—is coming under pressure in ways we could never have predicted a generation past. Nevertheless, men and women who voice their convictions—doing so winsomely, courageously, even when speaking might prove costly—change history.

Let me rephrase that concept in order to stress the point—it is minorities, not majorities, who change history and rescue the vulnerable. Whereas the mass of humanity seems always to rush headlong in oblivion, it is a courageous few who stand athwart the road to destruction, seeking to halt humanity's unheeding stampede. Motivated by love for Christ and deep concern for their friends and families, these few stalwart individuals labour mightily to warn of the coming destruction. They peer into the future and see with eyes of faith the consequences of foolish choices, warning against playing fast and loose with the commands of God. Join me as together we explore the decision this young woman made and the consequences of her choice.

BACKGROUND TO THE ACCOUNT — It was a drunken party that ended with the king demanding that his queen disrobe before his guests so they could see how beautiful she was. The queen had enough character that she refused his request. The result was that she was deposed as queen—the royal counsellors were fearful that wives would no longer obey their husbands. In fact, the queen is the sole person in this portion of the story that demonstrates any character.

Soon after removing the queen, the king began to feel lonely. Those paragons of worldly wisdom—his advisors—advised him to begin a search, sleeping with the most beautiful women in the country, until he found one he liked. People imagine that the penchant for loose morals witnessed among people in this day is something new and novel. However, immorality is as old as sin; it was evident long years before this present sinful day.

One of the young women selected was an orphan of perhaps fourteen or fifteen years of age named Hadassah, or Myrtle in our tongue. Hadassah had been raised by her cousin after the death of her parents. She was not Persian, and one must wonder if her exotic appearance enhanced her desirability. Whatever the case, the king enjoyed his night with her, and chose her to be his queen. So the young girl was deemed the prettiest girl in the land.

At this point the story is interrupted. Hadassah's uncle overhears a cabal plotting to kill the king. He informed his niece, who in turn told the king of the plot, telling him that Mordecai, her cousin, had acted to save the king, though she did not disclose her relationship to him. The attempt on the king was foiled, an entry was made in the archives and the plotters were hanged. It is almost as if this event was entered as a parenthesis—an event that, however interesting, was unimportant to the account we are reading. However, great doors turn on little hinges.

Other than her physical attributes, there wasn't much to distinguish Hadassah to this point in the story. However, things would shortly change and she would be compelled to respond to challenges that must have seemed unimaginable to her. A proud man was enraged because Hadassah's cousin—the man who had raised her—would not bow before him. In that day, refusal to bow before wealthy or self-important men was a slight that could not be ignored. It generated something like the disrespect felt by wealthy or powerful people in this day when they fail to receive the honour and acclaim they imagine to be their due.

That little man was the corrupt politician mentioned in the introduction. He was continually irritated by one man's failure to recognise his importance. So, he plotted a way that would permit him to show his power, ridding himself of this man in the process—he would lobby the king, manipulating him into ordering the death of the entire race from which that one man came. The people in question were a minority, generally despised, weak and powerless within the nation. And this vile little toad was successful, in part because the king, as has been true of many political leaders throughout all history, was easily manipulated.

At last, word of the evil machinations reached even Mordecai, cousin of Hadassah. On a given day, all the Jews living in Persian territories were to be exterminated. Mordecai wandered up to the king's gate where he began a very public fast. As he fasted, he lamented, crying aloud with wrenching, bitter cries. Throughout the kingdom, Jews were fasting and weeping, Mordecai being but one of the many lamenting because they faced extirpation.

When Hadassah became aware of Mordecai's fast, she attempted to intervene. I suppose it is possible that like modern people, she was embarrassed to witness a loved one mourning. One of the most foolish statements commonly uttered to those in distress is, "It will be all right." Akin to that foolish statement is the statement that urges one who grieves, "Don't cry!" Grieving is unbidden in most instances; we had as well tell the tide not to come in or command the rain to cease falling. Sorrow overwhelms the grieving soul, and the sorrow cannot be contained.

Hadassah sent Mordecai clothing, urging him to cease lamenting before the king's gate. Perhaps greater than embarrassment was her fear of what might happen to Mordecai should the king become aware of this unpleasantry; and, it is quite probable that she feared exposure as a Jewess. The king could not be made to feel ill at ease. Therefore, no one was permitted to mourn in his presence, except for when he himself was mourning. Then, everyone had better mourn with him, much as Koreans were compelled to mourn at the death of Dear Leader this past year. Mordecai, however, refused to break his fast or to cease his lamentation.

Let's be quite clear that Hadassah was attempting to preserve her family. In doing so, she failed to understand that when her people were threatened there truly was no safety for her family! In this day, people who focus on the immediate welfare of family when the nation, or when the community, or when the congregation is imperiled, are ignoring the fact that the greater danger is not avoided simply because the immediate problem is averted. The natural tendency of almost all people is to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the temporary. It is exemplification of the proverbial case of feeding others to the crocodile in hopes that you will be eaten last.

Hadassah sent once again to learn what had precipitated Mordecai's very public grief. When Hathach, the eunuch who attended her, came to Mordecai, the following exchange occurred. "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. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, 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" [ESTHER 4:7, 8].

THE CHALLENGE SHE FACED — Poor Hadassah; her cousin's refusal to cease mourning put her in a tough spot. If his lament caused the king discomfort, Mordecai would be executed—nothing could be allowed to disturb the king; he was an important man. On the other hand, Hadassah could not just waltz in and speak to the king whenever she wanted to do so. She explained her situation. “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” [ESTHER 4:11, 12].

In short, the king was capricious. Hadassah had no way of knowing whether she might be executed should she present herself uninvited. He had deposed a former queen; who could tell what he would do if he was in an irritable mood, or if he simply took exception to Hadassah's presence, or if he was suddenly attracted by someone yet younger in one of his harems? Any approach she made was fraught with very real danger.

Increasingly, Christians are called upon to reveal Christ in the midst of a hostile world. Undoubtedly, though our nation is extremely religious, it is not godly. Even among the churches, righteousness is not often honoured. What passes as Christianity is too often a form of religion that has been designated “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” [MTD]. MTD is defined by the following tenets:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.³

Modern society has rejected traditional Christian Faith. In fact, vibrant faith threatens the religious perception of most church goers. Rather than being transformative, religion has become a utility for enhancing one's personal comfort. This new religion is an anemic, insipid, a watered-down shadow of Judeo-Christianity. It is thoroughly anodyne, inoffensive and tolerant, which fits the preconceived notion of the average church goer.

While it is focused on the feelings of the adherent, MTD does not instill courage, for it has no conviction other than the certainty that anything that causes discomfort is bad. There can be no realistic expectation of a Martin Luther standing before the papal legate boldly declaring, “I am bound by the Scriptures ... and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” There will arise from this modern perversion of the Faith no Wilberforce to lead Parliament to strike down the laws justifying slavery and debasing a nation. There shall never arise out of the modern religion of MTD a Martin Luther King leading people to stand against police dogs and water cannons while singing “We Shall Overcome.” Rather, there will be the creation of religious people trilling, “We Shall Accommodate.” There will be politicians prepared to compromise and self-serving people prepared to follow them as they plunge the nation into ruin so long as they feel good about themselves. There will be pastors that say what they are paid to say.

³ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, **Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers** (Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2005) 162-3

It is in this present environment, however, that great and serious challenges face us today. Religious freedom, marriage and life itself are under assault as never before in our memory. Christians do not have the luxury of retreat into sacred enclaves where they can mewl about how hard life has become. Now is the time for Christians to shine forth as stars in the darkness. Jesus called His people to “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” [MATTHEW 5:16].

The Apostle to the Gentiles would urge all who dared follow the Master, “You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” [ROMANS 13:11-14].

He also instructed believers, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” [EPHESIANS 5:15, 16].

Increasingly, worshippers of the True and Living God face the challenge of speaking the truth in love in the midst of a world determined to redefine truth—moreover, a world which knows nothing of love. Instead of being a lifelong union of one man and one woman, marriage is redefined to be whatever we want to make it. We employ teachers without conscience and bereft of knowledge to indoctrinate our children, ensuring that the new orthodoxy will supplant the ancient Faith within a generation. Then, we marvel at how rapidly the transformation of society has taken place. Woe to the benighted individual who demurs from the new orthodoxy.

Today, physicians and nurses are expected to advocate for an end to life, being prepared to implement such an end rather than working to preserve life. Much as was true of the Nazi regime of an earlier day, modern western societies have decided that “quality of life”—an indefinable concept that means precisely whatever one wants it to mean—is of greater importance than is life itself. Thus, many within the health professions have exchanged the old ethic for a new ethic that is readily twisted into whatever shape people want it to be.

Infants, the most vulnerable members of society, are viewed much as one would view any other transient inconvenience. Thus, they may be torn from the safety of the womb and discarded just as one would discard a tumour or an unsightly wart. Those who perpetuate these despicable crimes against the most helpless individuals can anticipate honours and awards such as the Order of Canada. The imposition of the culture of death is now acceptable because no one dares to speak for the defenceless and the powerless.

Politicians are quite prepared to compel worship at the newly created shrine of personal choice, trampling religious freedom in the process; and few appear willing to risk the wrath of powerful individuals to say “Halt!” While Christians debate such timely matters as music styles and Bible translations, governments intrude into the sacred precincts, and no alarm is raised.

I hear many complaints that there is too much religion today. The problem facing us is not that there is too much religion; the problem we face is that what passes as Christianity is no longer marked with robust orthodoxy. Few professing Christians are able to articulate either what they believe or why they believe it. Thus, they are at the mercy of popular thought and their own transient feelings. Rather than being a people striving for “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,” our churches may be more accurately described as composed of “children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning [and] by craftiness in deceitful schemes” [see EPHESIANS 4:13, 14].

The challenge facing Christians today is whether we will be an orthodox people, or whether we will meld into the dim background of this fallen world. Either we will choose to live as the people of God, revealing Christ's presence, or we will live to please ourselves. Paul urged the Roman Christians, "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me'" [ROMANS 15:1-3]. Surely, we realise that if we will build up our fellow believers, we must not compromise this most Holy Faith.

Tragically, we have arrived at a day when those presenting themselves as Christian statesmen are in reality mere partisan hacks. Evangelicalism plunges toward Gnosticism while maneuvering to escape the claims of Christ. One writer speaks of the Osteenification of Christianity into a prosperity and plastic surgery cult;⁴ his assessment is tragically accurate.

This is the challenge facing the people of God in this day. Will we be Christian? Or will we surrender to the new religion of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism? The pull of the flesh is to avoid the difficult task, retreating while hoping that Christ will shortly return. However, Jesus commanded, "Engage in business until I come" [LUKE 19:13]; and our business is the salvation of the lost. We are responsible to know His will and to act boldly to do that will.

Mordecai sent a stern warning to the young queen, his cousin whom he had raised. "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 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" [ESTHER 4:13, 14]? As Mordecai warned Hadassah, so all who name the Name of Christ must know that we are expected to live righteously, to speak boldly of His grace, to renounce evil and to promote His Kingdom.

In conversation with a fellow pastor from a prairie province this past week, I was told, "Mike, my wife and I listen to your sermons online. You're not like our pastor. You're stern. You make us go back to the Word." I suppose that assessment is true. However, I am not attempting to produce cannon fodder for culture wars; I am endeavouring to build Christians. We are engaged in spiritual warfare, and I do not want any to fall wounded on the field of battle. The conflict rages; and the field is the world in which we live. With the Apostle, I urge you, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" [2 TIMOTHY 2:3].

THE DECISION TO ACT — Hadassah made her decision to act. Requesting that prayer be offered for her, she acted. She realised the risk entailed in acting, but she was determined to do what was right. "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" [ESTHER 4:16].

I hesitate to provide specific examples of responses of believers facing challenges today. There is always a fear that some will focus on the specific example rather than seeing it as a guideline. Nevertheless, it may be beneficial to note some specific incidents that have required courage and conviction in this day. John Stonestreet has provided some current examples of bold Christians who are prepared to sacrifice personal comfort for the cause of Christ. Knowing of their courageous stands may well encourage us to stand firm in the face of opposition.

⁴ Chuck Huckaby, "Review of Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics by Ross Douthat," Worldview Church, <http://www.worldviewchurch.org/equip/bibliotheca/18042-review-of-bad-religion-how-we-became-a-nation-of-heretics-by-ross-douthat>, accessed 26 June 2012

Kristin Waggoner is a Seattle lawyer who took a risk by representing pharmacies which refused to sell abortifacient drugs. The Washington State governor, the ACLU and Planned Parenthood fought Kristen every step of the way. But a federal district court decided in her favor, protecting the pharmacies' freedom not to participate in abortions. However, even had the courts decided against her, she made the correct stand.

Joseph Burns is a retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel. He is now an Air Force civil servant who put his career on the line to challenge the Air Force's new religious neutrality policy, which effectively endorses irreligion. The new policy prohibited officers from even "appearing" to endorse their faith, but at the same time removed consequences for officers who criticize religion. Burns calls this standard subjective and dangerous. And he's publically speaking out against the changed policy, while defending the religious freedom guaranteed by the very document he swore to "support and defend." His stance requires incredible courage.

I should mention as well Sheila Weber, Executive Director of the National Marriage Week, and Chairman Chuck Stetson, who also helps lead four other organizations dedicated to defending marriage. These two have stirred up considerable trouble for the "gay marriage" lobby; and they've got spots on the gay-rights propaganda hit lists to prove it. The ongoing calumny and vituperation from people advocating for an end to bullying is intense; standing firm against such evil requires great courage.

All of these individuals have this in common: they've each chosen to break "the spiral of silence."⁵

Courage may be witnessed in something as simple as determining that you will no longer be silent. Courage arises from the determination to respect life. Refusing to condone the culture that esteems convenience over conviction requires courage—courage born of righteousness. When government presses people of Faith to accommodate wickedness, it requires courage for a pastor to resist, knowing that he will face not merely opposition, but possibly retribution. At such times, he will need godly people to stand boldly with him in resisting the intrusion of politicians into the life of the Body of Christ. Our society debates the death of those who suffer from long-term illness. Taking the life of these vulnerable individuals is justified on economic bases. Where are the men and women of courage who will advocate for the defenceless and the weak? Where are the righteous individuals possessed of divine courage to demand that society halt the rush to cultural suicide?

Actions such as I've just described are dangerous, and we need to become dangerous. I am not advocating violence, nor am I suggesting that we need to seek to harm anyone. We are commanded to do good and to honour God in all things. I read that the early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down [see **ACTS 17:6**]; they did not do this through attacking persons, but through standing firm in the truth and boldly living out the Faith of Christ the Lord.

The method of the Christian is through presentation of the truth, through persuasion and reason. We are taught, "Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" [**2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5**]. We do not threaten, nor do we seek to employ the methods of this fallen world. We do not coerce or compel, but rather we appeal to reason through exposing the dark thoughts of fallen mankind.

⁵ Examples provided by John Stonestreet, "Become Dangerous," Breakpoint, May 11, 2012, <http://links.mkt3980.com/servlet/MailView?ms=NDIwODIyMAS2&r=OTQ0MjI2MTM0S0&j=NDM0MzY2MzgS1&mt=1&rt=0>, accessed 12 May 2012

Earlier, Paul had written the Corinthian Christians, outlining the methodology of the Faith of Christ the Lord. These are his words. “Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:1, 2]. Just so, we who will honour the Master will have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We will refuse to play the dastardly games according to the rules of this fallen world. Rather, we will speak the truth in love and hold firmly to that which is honest and honourable.

We who are born from above recognise our frailty, just as did the Apostle. He continued with this statement of how we are to live out the Christian life to the Corinthians. “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you” [2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12].

We have forgotten, if we ever knew, the power of a virtuous life. Paul could point to his own life when appealing to the Corinthians, who appear to have forgotten what it means to be Christian. “I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things” [1 CORINTHIANS 4:9-13].

THE CONCLUSION OF THE ACCOUNT — The remainder of the Book of Esther relates how she acted with discretion to disclose to the capricious king the craven deeds of the cowardly Haman. God Himself intervened to deliver His people when they stood boldly against that which was evil. Thus it is that to this day, when the people of God boldly pursue His glory, He is ever with them. Is this not the promise of God? “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20]. What a comfort for the child of God to read the final words Jesus spoke as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel: “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The method God used was not as we might have expected. We attempt to impose our expectations on God, and we are always disappointed. We tend to be somewhat like the little boy who was asked when he came home from Sunday School, “What did you learn today?”

“We learned about Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt,” he replied.

“Tell me the story,” his mother urged him.

The little lad told quite a tale. His story went something like this, “Well, Moses was leading the people out of slavery and toward the Promised Land. The people marched and marched until they came to the Red Sea. Pharaoh’s army was right behind them and about to catch up. Moses called up the engineers, and they built a pontoon bridge across the Sea. Then, he called for the jets to come bomb the enemy. They bombed them and strafed them, allowing the people to cross the sea and get away.”

“Are you sure that’s how your teacher told the story,” his mother asked?

The little lad, looking somewhat chagrined, said, “No, but if I told it like she did, you wouldn’t believe it.”

Our God will work when we stand firm. However, we must heed the Word that teaches us, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be added to you” [MATTHEW 6:33]. Tragically, much of contemporary Christendom has focused attention on us—what we can get out of serving God. Let me draw the message to a conclusion by reminding you that there is a great big world out there. Moreover, we serve the God who created that world. Therefore, He is worthy of our best service because He is God.

In a recent article, James Emery White observes, “Have you ever heard the way we talk? ‘I want to go where I’m fed’ or ‘I need to be ministered to’ rolls off our tongues without even blushing. We walk out of a worship service and say, ‘I didn’t get anything out of it’ as if worship was about what we received rather than what we gave to God. And it’s killing the church, blinding our vision, paralyzing our mission and muting our voice.”⁶

His point is that we have made our service all about ourselves; and thus we seek our own comfort rather than God’s glory. His points are worth considering in light of the message this day.

1. “It’s not about whether you are fed, but whether or not you have learned to feed yourself and, best of all, feed others.”
2. “It’s not about whether you are ministered to, but whether you are, yourself, a minister to others.”
3. “It’s not about whether you got anything out of the service, but whether you gave God anything *of* service.”⁷

It is not the job of the church to make you close to Jesus—it is your responsibility to draw close to the Master. It is not the job of the church to save your marriage—it is your responsibility to love your spouse and esteem her or to respect him. It is not the job of the church to raise your children—you are the parent, and you are accountable for instructing your children in righteousness. It is not the job of the church to give you friends—you are responsible to be a friend and to seek out friends. It is not the job of the church to feed you—you are responsible to feed yourself in the Word. It is not the job of the church to fight your battles or slay the giants your face each day—you are the one on the front line.

What I can say on the authority of God’s Word is that Christ stands with His people when they seek His glory. We are never deserted, but rather we are assured that He is ever with us. The promise of the Master is, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” [MATTHEW 18:20]. And again, the promise Jesus gave to each one who will follow Him is, “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him” [JOHN 12:26].

Does He stand with you? Have you received Him as Master over your life? Do you have His new life? Have you been saved and do you know His grace? It is through faith in His Name that life is given to each one. He died because of your sin and was raised from the dead to declare you right with the Father.

⁶ James Emery White, “Spiritual Narcissism,” Worldview Church, <http://www.worldviewchurch.org/wvc-digest/featured-articles/18050-spiritual-narcissism>, accessed 26 June 2012

⁷ White, *ibid*.

Thus, the Word of God declares, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [**ROMANS 10:9-13**]. Amen.