

For four weeks now, we've been hammering home a word that sums up the theme of this entire book – providence. Warren Wiersbe shares a thought from A.W. Tozer that helps give us a fresh perspective on that word. He says, *God will accomplish His sovereign purposes even if His servants refuse to obey His will! Dr. A. W. Tozer compared God's sovereign purposes to an ocean liner, leaving New York City, bound for Liverpool, England. The people on board the ship are free to do as they please, but they aren't free to change the course of the ship. "The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history," wrote Dr. Tozer. "God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfillment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began."* (The Knowledge of the Holy, p. 118).

For our time of study and reflection this week, I'd like to consider a word that sounds similar to providence – **prudence**. The dictionary describes prudence this way: *the quality of being prudent; cautiousness*. Cautiousness is helpful in understanding that word, but it can be even better understood by looking at its synonyms and antonyms. **Synonyms:** wisdom, judgement, common sense, good judgement, advisability. **Antonyms:** folly, recklessness, extravagance.

Why do I bring that word and its meaning up? Because it's easy for us, as we learn more and more to trust God's providential hand, to adopt a mentality that takes all responsibility out of our hands because "God's got this." Well, yes, God does have "this." He's got the whole world in His hands and as we established weeks ago, His purposes are going to be accomplished regardless of your decisions or mine. However, that certainly is no excuse to throw good judgement and common sense to the wind. God is sovereign, yes, but that doesn't excuse man's responsibility.

I would liken it to the person who frequently falls back on the phrase "everything happens for a reason," and counter that with the reality that *sometimes the reason is that we make foolish decisions*. Bruce Hurt said *"Faith in God's providence, instead of repressing our energies, excites us to diligence. We labor as if all depended upon us, and then fall back upon the Lord with the calm faith which knows that all depends upon Him."*

So, how does this understanding of prudence help us with our text for this week? I'm glad you asked! While we have been reminded several times that the name of God isn't mentioned in this book, this particular chapter is probably the closest *visual reminder* to resembling anything spiritual in the lives of Mordecai and Esther to this point. We have previously established that there were certain aspects of their lives that were not pleasing to or honoring God. Yet the beautiful thing is to remember that despite those shortcomings, God uses their situation to accomplish his purposes—just as He uses ours.

Have you ever wished you were in a different position in life in your desire to serve God?

The most repeated phrases from this entire book come from this chapter – just verses apart. Mordecai sends word to Esther regarding their impending doom and his plea to her is "go to the king and beg for your people!" While Mordecai may have his best interests and the interests of his people in mind, he must have forgotten about the laws of Persia along the way. Esther is quick to remind him in her rebuttal that unless the king summons her, she can't approach him and if she does and he withholds his golden scepter, she faces certain death. She hadn't even been summoned to him in the past thirty days!

Remember that these two are having to communicate through a third party – how frustrating that must

have been in such a tense time! The first exchange between the two of them goes as any of us would have probably expected – everyone is looking out for their best interests, not making any rash decisions. Perhaps prudence is starting to bud...

As the ball of communication flies back into Mordecai's court, he makes some very interesting comments. **First**, he gives her a very sobering reminder that while she might live in the king's court, her nationality is Jewish. He declares that when the determined time comes, she will be found out and suffer the same fate as the rest of her people. Then it would be too late to act. **Secondly** he makes a curious statement that I'm not really sure how to interpret. It sounds like an acknowledgement of God's providence in honoring His promises to Abraham, but it wasn't going to preserve them in this particular instance. Would the Jewish race go on? Yes. Would Mordecai and Esther and their friends and family be preserved? No. I believe that sums up his train of thought at the beginning of verse 14.

And **last** comes one of those two famous lines from this book - ***And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?*** Spurgeon gives an encouraging application for the Christian today regarding that famous question. He says *"Every child of God is where God has placed him for some purpose, and the practical use of this first point is to lead you to inquire for what practical purpose has God placed each one of you where you now are? You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus: do not wish anything of the kind, but serve Him where you are. If you are sitting at the King's gate there is something for you to do there, and if you were on the queen's throne, there would be something for you to do there; do not ask to be either gate-keeper or queen, but whichever you are, serve God therein. Are you rich? God has made you a steward, take care that you are a good steward. Are you poor? God has thrown you into a position where you will be the better able to give a word of sympathy to poor saints. Are you doing your allotted work? Do you live in a godly family? God has a motive for placing you in so happy a position. Are you in an ungodly house? You are a lamp hung up in a dark place; mind you shine there."*

Discuss how you would describe prudence in decision making with a teenager.

Esther is obviously moved by Mordecai's heartfelt plea and encouragement. She moves for those around her to join her in a three day fast. By imploring others to join her in this she demonstrates a real desire for clarity and wisdom moving forward. Sounds like prudence to me. And after calling for the fast, she makes that second famous statement. "if I perish, I perish."

Esther and Mordecai have their flaws, as we all do, but in this moment, she rises to the occasion and calling of her position as the Queen of Persia and as a child of the Most High God. Her courage in these words is certainly inspiring, but as you'll see in the next chapter, her prudence in moving forward shows that there was much more to her than just a pretty face. We might have started out this book seeing a young Jewish girl willingly, or unwillingly thrust into an ungodly marriage, but over the years she has been prepared by God to take part in an incredible illustration of His providential care. Come what may, she's ready.

Imagine you are discipling a young Muslim convert, in a predominantly Muslim country - how you would explain balancing prudence with obedience to the Great Commission. Remember that there is a stiff penalty (death) for leaving Islam to follow Jesus.