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STAND WITH CONVICTION



Who comes to mind as a person of deep conviction?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

It's always right to do the right thing.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Sometimes it's a hard choice to speak up, even when we know something is wrong. We may even be tempted to remain silent. After all, why risk retribution or losing our position or standing in the church or community?

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, refused the order from a bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama, to give up her seat for a white passenger. It was a simple gesture really, but one that would reverberate around the world and set the tone for the civil rights movement in America. Parks, a devoted follower of Christ, did not have the power to overturn Jim Crow laws or change the minds of those who believed in white supremacy, but she could do this one thing that was in front of her.

We can be overwhelmed by the enormity of the injustice around us. Fear or a feeling of inadequacy might even paralyze us, but Mordecai's example shows us the power of doing that one small thing—the *right* thing—that is in front of us.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 2:21–23

²¹ During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. ²² But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. ²³ And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Mordecai was in the right place at the right time. “Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate,” where much of the official palace business occurred. It was a busy location where people at all levels of government were moving in and out, working on official state business. This was the center of activity in the kingdom, where merchants conducted business, busybodies spread their gossip, and the powerful gathered.

Mordecai apparently served an important role at the king’s gate, though we’re not exactly sure what he did. He may have been appointed to this role or promoted to a higher position after Esther was made queen. This may have been a way to reward Mordecai, the father figure who had adopted Esther and cared for her after her parents died.

The king’s gate was also a center of much intrigue, and Mordecai was right in the center of it. Mordecai learned of an insider plot to assassinate the king. This was a shocking story, with all the features of a spy thriller. One queen had been deposed, and a new queen was chosen and crowned. Some in the palace were likely disgruntled and plotted a coup.

Mordecai had options. He could have simply sat on the information, letting the scenario play out. Perhaps if the king were dead, Esther would step in and lead, giving Mordecai greater influence and power.

What risks did Mordecai and Esther take in these verses?

QUESTION #2

But we can't assume Mordecai considered any options other than to do the right thing and prevent the king's death. Mordecai may have even disliked this pagan ruler, but he still intervened.

Mordecai's situation demonstrates the importance of doing the right thing in the moment, regardless of your feelings or the consequences. In one sense, this was just a small gesture—he passed on information. As we shall see in later sessions, that small gesture had great effect, but Mordecai couldn't have known that; he could not have imagined how this one act would set the stage for something far greater. He only knew it was the right thing to do.

Mordecai's action did not result in immediate honor, but it was recorded in the king's historical records. Quite often, when we obey the Lord, our obedience is unseen and doesn't get the attention we might think it deserves. We can take comfort in knowing that everything we do is seen and recorded by our King—King Jesus. Everything that is hidden will one day be revealed. (See Luke 8:17.)

I doubt Mordecai expected to receive honor when he spoke up. Although honor would come later, he acted simply because it was the right thing to do. As Christians, we are always on call to do the right thing regardless of the personal outcome. In fact, we may even suffer consequences for doing what is right.

Mordecai eventually was honored for his actions (see Esth. 5), but for the moment he was overlooked. Unlike King Xerxes, however, King Jesus doesn't forget our obedience. But quite often, our reward, like Mordecai's, will come later. We remember Peter's words: "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed" (1 Pet. 3:14).

We don't obey Jesus for the rewards or for the glory; we obey because it is what He calls us to do. We perform acts of justice on behalf of others because we love them and we love Jesus.

***What risks do we take
when we speak up
against wrongdoing?***

QUESTION #3

Esther 3:1-6

¹ After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

² All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. ³ Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" ⁴ Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶ Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

You would think that after Mordecai helped to save the king's life by thwarting this plot, the king would have given Mordecai some kind of honor. But instead, Xerxes promoted Haman. Up to this point, we've heard nothing about Haman. Apparently he was already a trusted figure in the Persian government, but now he was second only to the king. The reason for this promotion is not known.

With that honor came the king's command for all the royal officials to acknowledge Haman's position by bowing to him. And that one act brings us back to Mordecai, who refused to bow.

What were some possible motivations for Mordecai's refusal to bow?

QUESTION #4



Perhaps Mordecai refused to bow because he felt he'd be violating his worship of Yahweh. He would bow before no one but God. However, it was not a violation of the law of God to bow before kings and rulers. Mordecai was no grandstander, though; this was not a publicity stunt. Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was an act of conscience. He refused to compromise what he believed.

Taking such a stand was not without risk. Mordecai did so knowing it very well could cost him his life. Mordecai faced added pressure from the members of the royal court. Day after day, the members of the king's royal court badgered and warned Mordecai to bow to Haman.

Men like Haman don't take these kinds of slights lightly. Haman "was enraged." In his anger, Haman sought to eliminate Mordecai—but while he was at it, he also would destroy all the Jews in the kingdom; this would be the genocide of an entire race of people.

Compromise is not always a bad thing. Families know the value of compromise when it comes to planning a vacation, choosing a restaurant, or even deciding what to watch on television. But when it comes to doing what is right and standing up to injustice, we must never compromise.

Mordecai's example reminds us that doing the right thing is sometimes dangerous and risky.

- ▶ Standing up for someone facing discrimination could cost us some friendships.
- ▶ Refusing to cheat a client or customer could cost our jobs.
- ▶ Letting every kid who signed up for the team get in the game could cost us the win.

We don't back down—we refuse to compromise—when truth and justice are at stake. That's always the right thing to do.

How do we determine when to take a stand?

QUESTION #5

OPPORTUNITY IS IN THE NEWS

As you think of the news reports from the past week, list some examples of problems that people in your community are experiencing:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

In what ways are some of these similar to the problems experienced by Mordecai in this session?

What could you do to stand with conviction and help in one or more of these situations?

"The time is always right to do what is right!"

— MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

LIVE IT OUT

How will you stand with conviction this week? Choose one of the following suggestions.

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask God for the courage to do the right thing in small ways when the opportunity is presented in your family, your neighborhood, and in your church.
- ▶ **Observe.** Look for ways you can use your gifts, talents, and resources to do something meaningful to help the vulnerable around you.
- ▶ **Visit.** Check out a local homeless shelter, anti-trafficking organization, or pregnancy resource center to find ways you can help do justice and mercy on behalf of the voiceless.

Most of us have been in situations whether it was the neighborhood, workplace, or church, where we had an opportunity to say something to correct a wrong and we didn't. Let's learn from Mordecai's example and make a difference the next time!

My thoughts

