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Stand with Conviction



Who comes to mind as a person of deep conviction?

QUESTION 1

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, 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 (CSB)

²¹ During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ²² When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. ²³ When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the Historical Record in the king's presence.

Mordecai was in the right place at the right time. "Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate," (v. 21) where much of the official palace business would take place. It was a busy, active place where people at all levels of government were moving in and out, working on official state business. Merchants were likely present as well, pitching their wares. 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 was not uncommon in those days, as royals often appointed their own officers of the court. Assuming her new leadership role in an unfamiliar place would be much easier if Mordecai was nearby advising her. 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 midst of it. Mordecai learned of an insider plot to take down the king in verse 21: "Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus." 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 simply could have 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. But

What are our options when we witness an injustice?

QUESTION 2

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.

We might think doing right things or performing acts of justice involve big, splashy accomplishments that make headlines and "turn the world upside down." We look for that big, iconic moment. But following Jesus is not about one big moment; it's about a thousand little ones. It's about silent acts of obedience that nobody may ever see. It's about quiet acts of mercy that take place away from lights and cameras. It's about ordinary, unspectacular Christians doing the right thing every day.

In one sense, Mordecai's action was just a small gesture—he simply passed on information. However, this small act would set the stage for something far greater. You would think that after Mordecai helped to save the king's life by thwarting the plot against him, the king would have given Mordecai some kind of promotion or special honor. Mordecai's action did not result in immediate honor or celebration, but it was recorded in the king's historical records.

Esther 3:1-6 (CSB)

¹ After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials. ² The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage. ³ The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" ⁴ When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage. ⁶ And when he learned of Mordecai's ethnic identity, it seemed repugnant to Haman to do away with Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus's kingdom.

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

QUESTION 3

How do we determine when to take a stand?

QUESTION 4

Up until this point, we've heard nothing about Haman. Scripture tells us that King Ahasuerus chose to honor Haman and promote him to a high position. Apparently he was already a trusted figure in the Persian government, but now he was second only to the king. The reason for this honor and promotion is not known. Ahasuerus had a reputation for being an autocratic dictator, and perhaps he promoted Haman after the assassination plot to root out any other enemies of the king.

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.

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; in fact, bowing was customary (Genesis 33:3). To bow was an act of respect, not worship. And if Mordecai indeed served in the King's court, it was likely that he had previously bowed before King Ahasuerus or other royal officials.

Perhaps Mordecai refused to bow because Haman was an Agagite. Scholars believe the Agagites were also called Amalekites, and the Amalekites had long been enemies of the Jews. The Amalekites first attacked the Israelites as they entered the land of Canaan (Exodus 17:8-16). When God commanded Israel to completely destroy them and everything they had because of their actions against His chosen people, King Saul disobeyed (1 Samuel 15:1-33). Perhaps as





What can we do as a group to stand against injustice?

QUESTION 5

an Agagite, Haman felt this long-standing animosity with the Jews. Perhaps he had already displayed this animosity, even having a history of cruelty toward the Jews.

This last reason seems the most probable, but we just don't know. It seems clear, however, Mordecai was no grandstander; 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. To refuse a command of the king usually resulted in death, and Haman was not a forgiving man. 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. But Mordecai stood tall.

Mordecai had instructed Esther to keep her Jewish background secret, yet Mordecai did not keep his own heritage silent. The royal officials knew Mordecai was Jewish because "he had told them he was a Jew" (v. 4). Perhaps Mordecai was willing to adapt to living in a pagan culture, even keeping his nationality private so long as it didn't call for compromise. But bowing to pay homage before Haman, it seems, was a bridge too far.

Men like Haman, drunk on power, don't take these kinds of slights lightly. Haman "was filled with rage" (v. 5). In his anger, Haman sought to eliminate Mordecai—but while he was at it, he also would destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Given that Judah and Israel were now part of the Persian Empire, this would be the genocide of an entire race of people. Haman made the argument that exterminating the Jews was necessary for the king's security and the security of the nation (Esther 3:8-9).

Mordecai's example reminds us that doing the right thing is sometimes dangerous and risky. It might cost us something. It may even involve offering our time, energy, and resources on behalf of others. Still, we don't back down—we refuse to compromise—when truth and justice are at stake. It's the right thing to do.

"Better the poor person who lives with integrity than the rich one who distorts right and wrong."

PROVERBS 28:6

CHOOSE TO STAND



Which of the following obstacles have kept you from speaking up against wrongdoing? Circle all that apply.

- Disapproval from others
- Potential damage to a relationship
- Negative impact on your image or reputation
- Retribution
- Potential harm to future work opportunities
- Time and effort required to take a stand
- Indifference
- Other: _____

When faced with an opportunity to stand against wrong, how can you respond in a way that honors the Lord?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you stand with conviction this week?

- » **Pray.** Pray 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.
- » **Listen.** Listen for ways you can use your gifts, talents, and resources to do something meaningful to help the vulnerable around you. Pray and organize some options for doing so this week.
- » **Act.** Check out OneLifeMatters.org to find out ways you can be an advocate for others. As a group, choose a project and create a plan to get engaged.

Just like Mordecai, we have options when we're confronted with injustice. Seek the Lord's guidance and stand with conviction when the opportunity arises. **We can't fix every injustice we see, but we are called to step in where we can.**



My thoughts