



U.S. Department of  
Transportation

# News:

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs  
Washington, D.C. 20590

5.93

Contact: Jennifer Hillings  
Tele.: (202) 366-4321

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY  
BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION ELIZABETH HANFORD DOLE  
LAYMEN'S NATIONAL BIBLE COMMITTEE LUNCHEON  
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK  
NOVEMBER 21, 1986

I am especially pleased to help inaugurate this year's observation of National Bible Week, with its theme, "The Bible and the American Family." I brought along my most cherished possession, my grandmother's Bible. Mom Cathey lived to be almost 100 years old, and in all the years I was with her, I never heard an unkind word escape her lips. I never saw an unkind deed mar her path. She was a beautiful woman, who truly lived her religion.

Mom Cathey was a woman of joy. She enjoyed humor. I can remember her telling a story about a chicken and a pig, an old story that many of you may have heard. They were enjoying a marvelous parade...banners, flags, marching bands, when the chicken turns to the pig and says, "Let's do something special for these folks who prepared this great parade to show our thanks." "Like what?", the pig asked. "How about a nice breakfast of ham and eggs?", said the chicken. The pig replied, "For you, that involves only an offering, For me, it means a total commitment." Several years ago while visiting my nephew at Gordon Conwell Seminary, I heard Reverend Gordon McDonald, then Pastor of Grace Chapel, Lexington, Massachusetts, speak about total commitment, and I would like to share with you some of his thoughts regarding the story of Esther. Esther is a small, obscure book in the Bible that tells one story about a planned attack on the Jews, the people of God.

It is the saga of a woman, forced to make a decision regarding total commitment of her life.

It begins with a Jew named Mordecai, a civil servant in the court of a Persian king. This man had a beautiful, accomplished young cousin named Esther, whose father and mother were dead, and whom Mordecai had adopted into his family and raised as his own daughter.

- more -



Through an unusual contest, whereby many young women went before the king, Esther was selected as the new queen and indeed, she was known for the finest qualities of womanhood.

As queen, she became somewhat isolated, however, in her magnificent apartment, surrounded by servants --unlike Mordecai, who was out amidst the people, picking up pieces of information from many sources.

Mordecai learned, to his horror, that one of the top men in government had elaborate plans to put to death as many Jews as he could find. It was a careful plan: messages would go out to each province in its own language or dialect commanding that on a given day, tens of thousands of people would be slaughtered -- young and old, women and children alike..

Mordecai immediately sent a message to Esther: " Esther, you must do something -- you may be the only person who can reverse this decision of the king and his officials!"

What is there about Mordecai that makes him desperately concerned for his people? Is he just worried about his own neck? Of course not. He may be thinking of that, but he's concerned about the prospective victims of mass murder and cruel plunder.

Why is he so concerned? You and I have the same kind of information today -- yet, do we really share the concerns of a Mordecai? Every day we read in the paper of revolutions and boat people, earthquakes and starvation. We have more data than Mordecai would ever have -- yet this man is wrapped up in concern for his world, a world which he persists in treating as if it were his own family. What makes Mordecai the kind of man that he was? For one thing, this was not the first time he was acquainted with suffering. We learn in Chapters 1 and 2 of Esther that Mordecai had been in the Jerusalem Dispersal. He had seen with his own eyes, what happens when a foreign army enters a city -- terrorizing its people, and laying waste to its property.

Mordecai had been victimized by all that. You can almost hear his words leaping from the Bible -- never again!... That's what sensitizes -- when we see how people are being treated; when you come firsthand into contact with poverty, oppression and injustice, and the lostness of people spiritually. How do we develop the sensitivity today that leads us to total commitment? How can we emulate Mordecai's vision of a global family? For if we remain anesthetized, it may be that the greatest judgment of all will rest on us.

Mordecai had a commitment, yes, even at his own risk, to stop the slaughter of an entire race.

His message goes out to Esther to try to persuade the king to call off these terrible deeds.



Her response: "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has set but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the golden scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

In other words, Esther was telling Mordecai that she couldn't do what he asked. Chances are that if she went to the king, she might lose her head! Mordecai doesn't understand that -- he's already seen people lose their heads. It confounds him.

He has no sympathy for Esther's refusal to use her influence and her connections.

I'm somewhat sympathetic -- her resistance is understandable since she hadn't seen the suffering. She had a lot of things going for her. She had a beautiful apartment, servants, a comfortable life -- and when you get all of those things around you, it builds a resistance to anything which might threaten that comfort and safety.

I know how she felt -- and perhaps you do, too. I'm concerned about my health and security and I like a comfortable home -- a car to go to my office and to places of pleasure. I like the comfortable life. It's a very disturbing thing to think of going before the king.

There are three parts to Mordecai's answer to Esther.

First: Esther, think not that you'll escape this predicament any more than other Jews -- everything you have can be wiped out if this come to pass -- all the comforts and the pleasures. Mordecai is saying simply: if the thing that stops you from being a servant to thousands of people is your comfort and your security, forget it, lady -- for you're no more secure in there than we are out here. Esther shares the predicament.

For us, I think this says: all the things we treasure and hold on to, instead of generously sharing with those who need them more, can be lost at a moment's notice if we are not handling them responsibly. As custodians of God's gifts, members of His human family, we are called to be stewards of His creation in the spirit of Romans 15:1:

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

The second theme is privilege: if you keep silent, Esther, at a time like this, deliverance and relief will arise from some other quarter, but you and your father's house will perish.

God has given you, Esther, the privilege to perform, says Mordecai. Sometimes we seem to think: poor God -- let's get out and help Him a little



before this world crumbles around Him. God doesn't need our help. He's not dependent on us. It is our privilege to serve Him.

At the end of my life, I don't want to look back and realize that God gave my role and my opportunity to another, because I didn't perform. That's one thing that drives me to keep trying, though I have such a long way to go to reach the goal.

The third theme of the Esther story is providence. Mordecai says: Esther, who knows -- you just may have been placed where you are for such a time as this. God calls on people, and places them in a certain matrix of circumstances and says -- here's the moment. Now do your thing!

Mordecai got through to Esther -- her response: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

That's total commitment -- all the way from concern for the things she had, to the point of finally giving everything --even her life, to serve God... As you know, the king held out the golden scepter and granted Esther's request to save her people.

And now, what of our people? What does God want from you? What does God want from me?

God wants total commitment -- if he can't use me, he'll use someone else -- indeed, the story of Esther is a very humbling one.

I often wonder: am I using this period of public service to ensure in every way I can, a better life for all Americans through the policies and programs I deal with each day? Am I contributing all in my power toward fostering the spirit of family? Can I ease the suffering of a mother whose child might otherwise fall victim to a drunk driver? Can I enhance the safety of travelers on land and in the air, by banishing illicit drugs from the cockpits and engine rooms of modern transportation? Can we help struggling countries in Africa and Haiti with assistance in road building and dredging of ports?

This is a time of great challenges in our world -- many difficult problems confront us. But there appears to be a renaissance taking place in this country -- a return to Christian values. Our influence could mean the difference in many lives -- and each of us has that circle of influence. God may have brought us to a time like this, to participate in the salvation of many. The world is ripe and ready for men and women who recognize that they are not immune from predicaments of the day, men and women who are willing to accept the privilege of serving and who are ready to see that the providence of God may have brought them to such a time as this.



In closing, I want to share with you the most meaningful birthday I ever had -- a Biblical party.

One morning recently I was reading my Bible, when my eyes fell on Luke 14:12-13, where Christ says, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your rich neighbors ... invite the poor ..."

Meditating on what those words from Luke meant for my life, I thought of my upcoming birthday in two weeks, and somehow I knew I was to celebrate with the elderly residents of Sarah's Circle, our church-supported refuge for the street people of Washington. I shared this idea with Bob, whose birthday is seven days before mine. "That's how I want to celebrate, too," he said.

So I planned the party on his special day, at which time we met our honored guests at an inner city coffee house called The Potter's House. For several hours everyone shared some pretty elegant food catered from a French restaurant, but more importantly, we shared a few hours of our lives. The residents told stories of alcoholism, poverty -- about what had drawn them to Sarah's Circle. Spirits soared higher than the helium balloons. We heard Robert Wilson, a resident of Sarah's Circle, sing his own song, "I'm Glad I Met the Lord in Time," and we were moved to tears. Two cultures touched, briefly, and both were changed. Each resident got the gift he or she most desired. But Bob and I received the greatest of gifts: warm friendship, which will be shared again this coming Sunday. The people of Sarah's Circle affirm that life, more than a ladder to be climbed, is a circle to be danced; that the streets where my church has been called to work and witness can become a song in this nation, a beacon of hope to fearful and depressed people the world over. Thus, one of the truly meaningful experiences of my life was inspired by Bible reading. And each day as I read my Bible, I can't wait to find other such guidance and opportunity for growth.

Today launches the observation of what we call National Bible Week. As we move out across America, may we have the commitment of Esther! But of course, what we celebrate is not restricted to any narrow spot on the calendar. For only in the pages of the Bible can we find the right way for our nation. Only through its parables and prophecies can we make out the path that leads to individual salvation. The God who gave us life gives us a guide to get the most out of life. By following that guide, we can forge the bonds of family and ensure that no one among us is denied a place at the Lord's table. And we can build our own city upon a hill, a shining example of justice and righteousness, for all the world to see. Where did I get such an idea? Simple: I read it in the Bible. May God bless each of you in your great work, now and always.