

Life Group Lesson - Week of August 20

Racism. It's a horrible thing but it is nothing new. Regardless of how developed we think we have become, there is still evil around us that wants to take down entire people groups. Every day we are reminded that we live in a world that is divided and hate-filled. As followers of Christ one of the worst Credo Killers is apathy—a disregard or indifference towards the suffering of others. And as horrible as apathy is, there is something even more dangerous in the body of Christ than a lack of concern. It is having the *appearance* of compassion without taking action.

Jews have been discriminated against throughout history. During Persian rule, there was a remarkable Jewish girl by the name of Hadassah whose beauty and intelligence brought her to the attention of the Persian king, Xerxes. While many Jewish exiles had returned to Judea by this time (circa 483-473 BC), Esther (Hadassah her Jewish name) and her cousin/father-figure, Mordecai, remained in Susa. As queen, Esther concealed her race. But then when the annihilation of her people was at stake, she courageously rose up to stand with her people.

Read Esther 4:1-17 (for thorough background, read the entire book of Esther)

Because Mordecai would not honor Haman, a high court official (Esther 3:1-4), Haman maliciously plotted to annihilate all Jews.

1. Read Haman's plot in Esther 3:8-9. What core emotions, fears, evil desires fuel ethnic hatred? (list everything you can think of)

We all deal with some level of prejudice or racism. Anytime we think we are somehow better – or in some way superior to another person, nationality, religious persuasion, denomination, socio-economic rank, or sect of people – we have just elevated ourselves to a superior position. And in God's eyes, that is sin. God's people must rise above the smugness of self-righteousness and through the power of His Holy Spirit live sacrificially as Christ did, fully devoted to our risen Lord.

What is the opposite of racism? (see Colossians 3:12-15)

Do I really care about those the world rejects, or do I just pretend to care? Once Mordecai confronted Esther about her unique position to save the Jewish people from a kingdom-wide massacre, she knew she hasda decision to make.

2. Read Mordecai's piercing message to his younger cousin, the queen, in Esther 4:13-14. What do his words tell you about this godly Jewish man?

Read Esther's honest response in 4:15-16. How does Esther's resolve speak to you? What particularly stands out to you in this exchange between Mordecai and Esther (vv13-17)?

Mordecai knew Esther was placed on the throne for a purpose bigger than herself and his words in 4:13-14 echo for all who are tempted to disappear into title and position. Like Esther when challenged by Mordecai, our willingness to rise up and face evil could very well save many lives. Courage is not the absence of fear, but it is choosing to do the right thing in spite of our fear.

Will we emulate our Lord? Jesus was not afraid of associating with people of a different race (John 4:7) nor was He afraid to eat with tax-collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). When we are tempted to wear spiritual smugness, we should remember Jesus also confronted religious leaders for their self-righteousness (Matthew 23:2-33). If we truly want to reflect the image of Christ we must die to self *daily* and take up our cross *daily* (Mark 8:34). This is hard but it is the attitude exemplified by our Lord (Philippians 2:5-8).

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Text: Esther 4:1-17

Plain Truth:

_____ is a credo killer, but compassion without _____ is a _____ killer.

1. _____ aloud that there is a problem and our silence only sustains the problem.
2. _____ others to be a part of the solution and get involved in making an eternal difference.
3. _____ others of God's redemptive story that injustice and sin will not have the last word!



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