This morning, we begin our series on the Book of Esther. Esther is an interesting book. It’s a Cinderella story. It’s the only book in the Canonized scripture in which God’s name is not mentioned. Neither is prayer, though Ester charges her fellow Jews to fast for her before she approaches the King. His Queen Vashti, as the story goes, has angered King Ahasuerus (a.k.a. Xerxes) of Persia, and so he held a Miss Persia Pageant, determined to replace her. Esther finds favor with the King and becomes his new queen of Persia, without her ever revealing her Jewish heritage. Her cousin Mordecai, who has become, in essence, her adoptive father, has instructed her to keep secret that she is a Jew (Esther 2:21-23).

As the story goes, Mordecai overhears a plot to kill the king. He tells Esther, Esther tells the King, and the two men engaged in the plot are executed. We are now caught up with the fast-moving plot, but there is so very much more to come.

 Listen, family, there are so many lessons for us in this book. First comes this truth: You and I are not the heroes of our life stories. Though God’s name is not mentioned in this book, His character and providence are evident on every page. The doctrine of sovereignty is on display as well. We will unpack these things in the weeks to come, but today, I simply want to tell you that just as God wrote Esther’s story, He is at work unfailingly writing your story as well--as long as you stop trying to steal the pen (!). Let me explain. There are times in the life of every believer when God seems distance. We can’t hear Him; we don’t feel Him. What do we do? Before answering this question we must remind ourselves that, family, your faith can’t be based on your feelings. There is, quite obviously, too much *Me* in a faith based on feelings. Oh, I am sure Esther wondered, “Why am I here?” But she trusts Him with her story. Because God is the hero of our story and the author of every chapter of that story, we must trust Him in the valleys as well as on the mountaintop. What is God teaching you in those times when you don’t hear Him? Perhaps, there is there un-confessed sin. Perhaps, you should ask, “Have I failed to guard the intimacy with you, Father?” Family, the fact that you can’t see what God is doing does not mean He is not working. Hebrews 12:2 tells us, “2 Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” That word “fix” comes from a Greek word meaning to concentrate the gaze. It means to look away from other things that surround you so that your attention can be on that one object, in this case Jesus Christ. Sometimes, the necessary focus presents challenges. Fixing your eyes may require repentance. Sometimes, the focus requires you to develop newly found spiritual habits, or, maybe, giving something up. When one’s eyes are fixed on Him, the believer walks carefully in His footsteps. Each of us must trust His power, His authority, His unyielding love for us. As the object of His love and grace, we CAN truth the Author (see, again, Colossians 1:13-14). Paul confirms Christ’s love, and Christ confirms the Father’s love; this confirmation means that my redemption story and yours is for our good and for HIS GLORY!

 And here’s news: neither you nor I am entitled to know everything that God is doing. Paul Tripp has said, “We do not need to know everything we think we need to know.” Isn’t that how things ended for Eve? Your concern has to be with the hero of your story, the Author Himself. Your story isn’t an autobiography. It’s a story of redemption and grace being written by the greatest author ever. Every plot twist, every new chapter, is a tool of His grace. Each new chapter He writes for us advanced HIS purpose. Listen, family, I believe everything His word says. In Romans 8:28, Paul tells us, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

 In those dry times, those seemingly distance times, it is especially important that each of us takes spiritual inventory. Again, do I have un-confessed sin or misplaced priority (or priorities)? Or have I surrendered intimacy? Where are my eyes fixed? Have I trusted that sometimes what appears to be a setback is actually a set up for God to move mightily? We will see later in Esther that God had a tremendous plan all along. He writes Esther’s story for HIS glory. The Jewish festival of Purim celebrates what God accomplished through Esther. Ultimately, family, Esther teaches us that we must fix our eyes—concentrate our gaze—on Jesus. And we must continue to pray. Even when God seems silent or distant . . . PRAY!

 Prayer has to do be God-centered and not us centered. John the Apostle tells us, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1John5:14). God doesn’t tell us that He will answer as we would wish or within a timeframe of our desire. But God answers, yes or no or wait. Of course, our problem is that we hate the waiting. But Isaiah 40:31 tells us, “they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not grow weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Church, if you are struggling with a dry season, if you feel distant from God, I have one final word for you: PERSIST. Mordecai persisted, with purpose. And for Esther, he was always there. So, be available. And be aware that God is available! God has not abandoned you. He is still writing your story. God placed Esther where He wanted her to be for a greater purpose than her comfort. He was the hero of Esther’s story; He is the hero of your story! Trust the Word more than your feelings. *Pray* and *persist*; *be available*. And let God keep the pen for the authorship of your story for His glory!

BIBLICAL TEXTS (NKJV) FOR THIS WEEK’S SERMON:

\*Colossians 1: 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

\*\*Esther2: 8 So it was, when the king’s command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king’s palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king’s palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women.

10 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women’s quarters, to learn of Esther’s welfare and what was happening to her.

12 Each young woman’s turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months’ preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. 13 Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women’s quarters to the king’s palace. 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

15 Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. 17 The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

Mordecai Discovers a Plot

19 When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king’s gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

21 In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.