

September 23, 2007

“Finding Your Mission”

Part 2 (Supreme or Substitute Mission?)

Eph 2:10 NLT

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Last week we established that you and I were created to have a mission in life. We are made to make a difference. We need to find our God-given mission and get in the game. Today I want to talk to you about a danger, a hazard that you must be aware of when it comes to choosing a mission and it is this: If you do not pursue the mission for which God made you, you will find a substitute mission. We can't live in the absence of purpose. If you do not live the supreme God-assigned mission, you will live a substitute mission. That is like playing a game you were not meant to play.

When I was in Jr. High School (now called middle school, yes, I'm that old) in gym class we would learn and play the game of whatever season of sport it was. So if it was the football season, or the baseball season, or the wrestling season, or basketball season, we would learn the rules, techniques of that sport and play that game (I'm not sure what season dodge-ball was). Anyway, during wrestling season the gym teacher paired us up with someone our size and weight to practice different wrestling techniques (it was kind of difficult to find someone my size and weight so I usually practiced with someone a little bit bigger than I was). I was paired off with someone who was actually on the wrestling team and I must have impressed him, because he went and told the gym teacher, who was also the wrestling coach, that I was pretty good. The coach came over to me and said, “Bonfiglio, come after school and try out for the wrestling team.” And I said, “Nah!” And the coach said, “What ya want do Bonfiglio, just hang out with those punk friends of yours?” And what he was saying was, you are with the wrong team. You are playing a game you were not meant to play.

I mentioned last week that Jim B. and I attended a Leadership Summit and one of the speakers, John Ortberg, mentioned what he called a “shadow mission.” John has said that “Carl Jung (whose father was a pastor) used to speak of our shadow side: those patterns of thought and action that betray our deepest values, that lead to regret and guilt. The image of shadow is helpful. It describes that sense of hiddenness, vagueness, and confusion that my sin causes. Just as we all have a mission – a way of contributing to God's kingdom that we were designed and gifted for – we also have what might be called a shadow mission. My shadow mission is what I will do with my life if I drift on autopilot. It consists of the activities toward which I will gravitate if I allow my natural temptations and selfishness to take over. Everyone has a shadow mission.” (John Ortberg, *When The Game Is Over It All Goes Back In The Box*).

By way of illustration one time a man I know asked me and some other close friends if we could get together with him. He asked that we not tell anyone who we were meeting or where we were meeting. It was like a covert operation. Men getting together for a

secret mission. I could tell you now who it was and where we met , but then I'd have to kill you! When we met with him and asked him what all the secrecy was all about he said, "I've been staying up at night watching pornography on TV while the world goes to hell." There was some nervous laughter from the guys. Then he said something like, "I'm going to say that one more time, only this time I want you to listen and not laugh." Then he said again, "I've been staying up at night watching pornography on TV while the world goes to hell." This time the silence was sobering, as each of us gave serious thought to this important matter. Our friend was saying he had found a substitute mission to replace the supreme mission of God for his life and he needed to admit it and have us help him get back in the right game.

The book of Esther can help shed more light on missions of God and substitute missions. The book begins with King Xerxes having a party. He like parties. He reigned over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia and having these great banquets was a way of showing off his power, his greatness and fame. However, he was not, in fact, a man of a great inner strength of character.

The book opens with the king at one of these banquets. The celebration lasted six months. That 180 days of serious partying. When it was all over, the king had another special banquet. The first banquet was for the big wigs the second was for the common folk. On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was half drunk with wine (how can you be half drunk, unless he was half as drunk as he was going to get. At any rate high on wine) he sent for Queen Vashti. He had been showing off his possessions now he wanted to show off his ultimate possession.

What do you think he wanted to show off about her? Her intelligence? - "Watch her solve these math problems!" Her personality? No, (Est 1:11 NLT) "He wanted all the men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman."

But (v12) when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. She probably thought, "There's no way I am going to go to his stupid party to have his drunk friends gawk at me." Did the king realize the awkward position he was putting her in? Not a clue! For when she refused, "This made the king furious, and he burned with anger."

The Queen was threatening his substitute mission of impressing others. He would appear weak and he would not have that. So (Est 1:13) he turned to "his advisers, who knew all the Persian laws and customs, for he always asked their advice." He asked them, "what should I do with my wife? She refuses to let me exploit her." For he wanted to appear to be in control and she embarrassed him.

His advisors told him to (Est 1:19) "issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from your presence (that probably did not break the queens heart any, that was her crime in the first place) and ... choose another queen...."

Well, what a surprise, the king and his princes loved the idea. (Est 2:2-4) So his attendants suggested, "Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king. (we'll have a beauty pageant) Let the king appoint agents in each province (all 127 of them) to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem... will see that they are all given beauty treatments. After that, the young woman who pleases you most will be made queen instead of Vashti." This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect immediately. (No surprise there either!).

One of the contestants was a young, beautiful and lovely Jewish girl, named Esther, adopted and raised by her cousin, Mordecai. She became a finalist in the pageant and was selected to go before the king. But first she had to complete (Est 2:12) " twelve months of beauty treatments--six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments." Wow, how would you like that pressure for a first date? Imagine having twelve months of preparation and then the guy isn't attracted to you. Well, Esther did win the contest and became the new queen. And what do you think the king did? He threw a party to show off his queen.

Now it turns out that the king's prime minister, Haman, had been deeply offended by Esther's, cousin (and guardian), Mordecai, because Mordecai would not bow in his presence to pay him honor and respect. Haman was obsessed with power, demand respect and could not over look this rebellion. He found out that Mordecai was a Jew and decided to get revenge by destroying all the Jews in the kingdom.

When word of what Haman wanted to do reached Mordecai, he realized that there was only one person in the empire in a position to save all of Israel...the pageant winner! God's plan to save the Jewish people was placed in the hands of a beautiful queen named Esther. God reveals His mission for Esther through the words of a wise and trusted spiritual friend, as He often does in our life too. Mordecai told her she must go to the king.

Esther was not prepared for this. She had been taught that her value to the king was her face and her body. She reminded Mordecai that it was a capital offense to approach the king if he had not called for you. And, she added, the king had not called for her in a month...I guess the honeymoon was over.

But Mordecai told Esther that being a wealthy, pampered, beauty queen was her substitute mission. Her true and supreme mission was to take courage and use wisdom to save her people. And he warned her (Est 4:13-14 NLT) "Don't think for a moment that you will escape there in the palace when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die." Then he said those words that she would remember for the rest of her life. "who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?"

Mordecai was letting Esther know that she was not brought to this point in her life for the purpose of having an expensive wardrobe, and precious jewels. She had not been

brought to this place in her life to become the most desirable women in the kingdom. Security, fame, attractiveness, safety – these were not her mission. They were her substitute mission, her “shadow mission.” Her supreme mission was to be part of God’s plan to redeem the world. So it was no coincidence that she had been elevated to the palace. No, it was God’s plan for “just such a time as this.”

Esther asked for there to be three days of fasting and prayer before she approached the king. She would do the same. “And then,” she said (Est 4: 16) “though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I am willing to die.” The commitment was made, what courage! There were depths in Esther that she was not even aware of – as there also are in you.

The third day Esther put on her royal robes and (Est 5:1-3) “entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance.” Can you imagine what she is thinking and feeling. This is it. A moment of life or death. This is real faith, she is trusting God, and if He doesn’t come through she is a dead duck queen (I’ve heard of a lame duck queen...). “When (the king) saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her, holding out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached (him)... Then the king asked her, “What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!” (kings were always saying that, they didn’t really mean it, it’s equivalent to promising the moon. But it did mean that the king was in a good mood). Then wisely she says, “I’m having a party, you and Haman come.” As we know the king never turned down a party in his life. At the party he had such a good time that he asked her about her request. What does she do? She invites him to a second party and told him she would ask him then. Now, Esther is showing remarkable wisdom. By coming to the party the king is already agreeing to her request.

Haman, of course is so excited to be included in all this. That night he (Est 5:10-13) gathered together his friends and ...his wife, and boasted to them about his great wealth and his many children. He bragged about the honors the king had given him and how he had been promoted over all the other officials and leaders.

Then Haman added, "And that's not all! Queen Esther invited only me and the king himself to the banquet she prepared for us. And she has invited me to dine with her and the king again tomorrow!" (See how powerful I am?). Then he added, "But all this is meaningless as long as I see Mordecai the Jew just sitting there at the palace gate."

Haman’s substitute of “shadow mission” was to have more power, more wealth and more recognition. But the soul can not be fed by substitute/shadow missions. He wanted more but it would never be enough – it never is. His wife suggests having a gallows built 75 feet high and have Mordecai hung on it. (Est 5:14 NIV) “This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.”

That same night, the king couldn’t sleep. He asked his servant to read to him (I guess he figured, “I’m the king, I shouldn’t have to read myself to sleep). And he had his servant

read to him from his favorite book, a book about himself (a book of the historical records of his kingdom). And they read to him about a time when Mordecai saved the king's life from a planned assassination. When the king asked what recognition Mordecai had received for his good deed, the king was informed that Mordecai was never honored. At that moment, Haman arrived to ask the king to hang Mordecai, knowing nothing about the account the servant just read to the king. So Haman came in but before Haman could say a word to the king, the king asked him (Est 6:5-10) "What should I do to honor a man who truly pleases me?"

Haman thought to himself, "(the king must mean me) Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" So he replied, "If the king wishes to honor someone, he should bring out one of the king's own royal robes, as well as the king's own horse with a royal emblem on its head. Instruct one of the king's most noble princes to dress the man in the king's robe and to lead him through the city square on the king's own horse. Have the prince shout as they go, 'This is what happens to those the king wishes to honor!' " (hint, hint, nudge, nudge, wink, wink)

Now imagine this moment when the king says to Haman, "Excellent!" (idea the man is Mordecai). Do not fail to carry out everything you have suggested."

It was all down hill for Haman after that. Esther held yet another banquet and told the king what she and her people were to be destroyed. (Est 7:5-6) "Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would dare touch you?"

Esther replied, "This wicked Haman..." And Haman ended up being hung on the very gallows built for Mordecai. Now, someone is needed to replace Haman, and who do you think Esther arranges to get that position? Mordecai.

Then the king says (Est 8:8) "Now go ahead and send a message to the Jews in the king's name, telling them whatever you want, and seal it with the king's signet ring. But remember that whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can never be revoked." The new decree saved the Jews.

This story is about choosing the right mission. It says that perhaps where you are today is no accident. "Who can say but that you (are where you are)...for just such a time as this?"

Esther did not set out to be queen, but once she was she had to decide between a substitute mission of safety, wealth, and power or her supreme God-given mission of saving her people. Haman could have used his power for what was right and just instead of the shadow mission of selfishness and cruelty. The king could have had the mission of generosity instead of shallow pleasure. What about you? This is your time.

Let's also consider the role of Mordecai. If Esther had not had Mordecai perhaps she never would have understood her mission. Who plays the role of Mordecai in your life? Who is your Mordecai? Who knows you well enough, and loves you enough to help and

challenge you when you want to choose your substitute mission. And whose life are you called to play the role of a Mordecai?

Jesus was tempted to choose a substitute mission over His supreme mission. He could have been a Messiah without a cross. His victory give His followers courage to renounce their substitute mission.

How is it that of all the women in the empire, a Jewish girl named Esther becomes the queen? How is it that of all the people in the empire, Mordecai was the one who saved the king from assassination? How is it that the king can't sleep on the very night Haman built a gallows for Mordecai? How is it that of all the stories that could have been read to the king that night, the servant reads about Mordecai saving the kings life? How is it that you ... well you complete that sentence. The answer is God is with you and has a plan for you...don't settle for anything less then His mission for you, your supreme mission.

Identify your substitute mission. Where does your life drift when you are on autopilot?

Are you living in your substitute mission? Avoid living in your substitute mission. Stay on your supreme mission.

Identify your Mordecai (have people who can give you honest feedback on your character).