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Date with Destiny

Brave is speaking up

Eugene Bouchard is a Canadian tennis player. In 2014, she made the final of Wimbledon, reaching her career-best ranking of number five in the world. Bouchard is also prolific on social media with over a million followers online. One day, she wrote something on Twitter that she may have quickly wanted to take back.

February 5th, 2017 was a big day in American sport—the National Football League (NFL) Super Bowl. Over 100 million viewers tuned in to watch the Atlanta Falcons take on the New England Patriots. Atlanta dominated the game early leading 21-3 at halftime, and the game only deteriorated for the New England Patriots with Atlanta scoring in the third quarter to extend their lead to 28-3. At this point all the commentators agreed: the game was over, and it would take a miracle for the Patriots to come back and win.

Eugene Bouchard was watching the game and it was

at this point she decided to tell her one million twitter followers that, “I knew Atlanta would win.” One of her followers named John Goehrke, a twenty-year-old student at the University of Missouri, decided it was time to declare his undying love for Eugene. He wrote back to the 22-year-old Bouchard saying, “If the Patriots win, we go on a date?” Bouchard was so confident of an Atlanta victory she replied with “Sure.” It wasn’t long after this that the Patriots scored a touchdown, the scoreboard now reading 28-9 heading into the final quarter.

Atlanta had dominated the game all day but, in the final quarter, the tide began to turn in the Patriot’s favour. The Patriots did all the scoring in the final quarter but were still trailing the Falcons 28-20 with less than a minute to go. A last-minute touchdown levelled the scores at 28-28 as the final siren sounded, and the game was headed for extra time. Suddenly, Bouchard was starting to feel extremely nervous. She was now facing the very real prospect of having to go on a date with a total Twitter stranger. The New England Patriots scored in extra time to record the greatest comeback in Super Bowl history. As Captain Tom Brady held the Vince Lombardi Trophy aloft, Bouchard was on Twitter arranging a date, tweeting, “So where do you live?”

Bouchard was true to her word and she and Goehrke went to a basketball game together. The two of them got on so well they went on more dates including attending the following year’s Super Bowl, and this time Bouchard wasn’t making any predictions. It was an unlikely comeback and an unlikely date—Bouchard is a tennis superstar with a million twitter followers, while John

Goehrke is just an ordinary guy who found himself in the right place at the right time and took a risk which changed his life in the course of one dramatic quarter of football. When John Goehrke spoke up on Twitter, it changed his life, but in the Bible, we meet Esther who spoke up and saved a nation.

To set the scene:

Esther is an ordinary Jewish girl whose life is turned upside down by events beyond her control. She lives with her cousin Mordecai because her parents have died, but we have no details about this tragic event and the impact it had on her. Mordecai and Esther live in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire which covers 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. They are Jews living far from their homeland because of another tumultuous event: The Babylonian invasion. Many decades earlier the Babylonian army invaded Jerusalem, taking Mordecai’s family to a foreign land⁷, and in time the Babylonian empire was conquered by a new power, the Persian Empire.

The King of the Persian Empire is called Xerxes and in the third year of his reign he throws a spectacular banquet lasting 180 days. Xerxes pulls out all the stops, no expense is spared as he shows off the great wealth and splendour of the Persian Empire. If 180 days of partying weren’t enough, when it’s all over the king throws another banquet lasting seven days for those in the fortress of Susa. The wine flows freely at this event and the king has an open bar policy. Everyone can drink as much as they like, and Xerxes is in high spirits because of the wine. The

⁷ Esther 2:6

King gets a little tipsy, singing out of tune karaoke and falling off his barstool, before summoning the Queen to show her off to everyone. Ordering his servants to bring out Queen Vashti so that everyone can gaze at her beauty, Xerxes is treating Vashti as a trophy wife, wanting to show her off to boost his ego.

Queen Vashti, understandably but perhaps unwisely, turns down the King's demands. We begin to learn what happens in Persia when you displease the King when Vashti is deposed as Queen, never to be seen again. The King wakes up the next day with a splitting headache and realises he doesn't have a queen anymore, which makes him sad because he quite liked Vashti. To cheer him up, his servants propose searching the Kingdom to find beautiful young women, with the woman who most pleases the King becoming queen in Vashti's place. Let's be clear, the king isn't looking for a wife. He's looking for a supermodel—less of a wife and more of a reality show contest winner. The King likes Esther far more than any of the other contestants and makes her the queen. In our day, we have the freedom to marry or to not marry—Esther has no choice. She could refuse, but, like Vashti, if she does, she will never be seen again.

Overnight, she goes from obscurity, to becoming the Queen of Persia, but Esther has a secret. She's Jewish, but Mordecai advises Esther never to tell anyone about her nationality for own her safety. There are people in high places with agendas against the Jewish people, and one of these people is Haman—the most prominent official in all Persia. He is an Agagite, a people that had been

defeated generations earlier by Israel's King Saul.⁸

Haman is a power-hungry, self-obsessed, showboating megalomaniac⁹, and when Mordecai refuses to tickle Haman's ego by bowing to him, Haman is enraged. And it's not enough for Haman to remove one Jew, he must remove them all! Haman uses deception and bribery to convince Xerxes to destroy the Jewish people. The news travels around the kingdom of the Jews' impending doom, yet Haman doesn't know that the Queen herself is Jewish.

Mordecai sends a message to Esther alerting her to the plight of the Jews, but Esther's reply is underwhelming. She reminds Mordecai that you can't simply waltz into the king's office and help yourself to his fridge. You can only see the King when he invites you, go uninvited and you might never be seen again. Esther adds that she's not very influential around the palace anyway, she hasn't seen the King in over 30 days.

Mordecai tells Esther two things in response, firstly: that God will rescue the Jewish people with or without her and, second: that perhaps that God made her queen for this very moment. Esther is in the right place at the right time—will she take a risk to save her family and her people?

Esther tells Mordecai to ask everyone to pray, and three days later she puts on her royal robes and enters the inner court. She doesn't know if the King will welcome her or if it will be the end of her.

⁸ You can read about this in 1 Samuel 15.
⁹ He's very self-important

Queen Esther's date with destiny

The King holds out his royal sceptre to welcome Esther, asking her, "What do you want, Queen Esther? What is your request?"¹⁰

Esther invites the King and Haman to dinner—and we know how much the King enjoys a feast! At the banquet, the King is eager to know what Esther's request is, but Esther still won't divulge her secret. She asks the King to come to a second banquet where she will finally reveal her secret—it will be her date with destiny.

It takes three opportunities, but Esther finally spills the beans. She bravely reveals her identity to the King and tells the King about Haman's plot to annihilate the Jewish people, who becomes faint as his evil plan is exposed. Haman is deposed and never seen again, Mordecai is promoted to replace Haman, and Esther and Mordecai issue a new law to save the Jewish people.

There are times in life when it's important to speak up and speak out against what is wrong. It won't be easy; speaking out can be risky with plenty of downsides. You might be tempted to keep quiet as Esther was, but God helped Esther overcome her fears, and He can help you overcome yours. When you speak up for what's right, you are brave in the making.

¹⁰ Esther 5:3

Bible Story: This story is found in the Book of Esther.

Press Pause: *Is there something I need to speak up about?*

Verse to remember:

Don't be afraid, because I'm with you. Don't be anxious because I am your God. (Isaiah 41:10 ISV)