

## “TIME TO SHINE!”

by Rom A. Pegram (1/1/17)

**Esther**, of course, was her Persian name. Her Hebrew name was **Hadassah**. She was an orphan from the tribe of Benjamin. She lived among the Jewish exiles in Persia, raised by her first cousin, **Mordecai**. He was a minor government official, under the rule of the current King of Persia—**Xerxes**. So, most likely our story for today takes place about 500 years before the birth of Christ...

**Vashti**, the queen of Persia, embarrassed the king at a party, so he divorced her. He then needed to select a new queen. Women from all over the empire were selected and given a 12-month beauty treatment. After that ‘year of the spa,’ a different woman from this bunch was sent to appear before the king one at a time. When Esther’s turn came the next morning ... *she became queen!* Now, I’m sure that if the king had known that she was Jewish, she wouldn’t have received her crown. But Mordecai had told Esther to keep her faith and ethnicity a secret...

To make a long story short (read the book of Esther for the complete story), Mordecai got in trouble one day for *not* bowing down to a higher ranking palace official named Haman. You have to understand that Mordecai was a Jew and Haman was an Amalekite—two parties who’d been warring for years. The lack of respect angered Haman to the point that he went to the king and had him issue an edict to not only punish Mordecai, but to get rid of all the Jews once and for all. He even had a gallows built that was 83’ tall! Let’s pick up with the story now as we move to our scripture lesson for today (Esther 4:1-16, NLT)...

When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. <sup>2</sup> He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. <sup>3</sup> And as news of the king’s decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

<sup>4</sup> When Queen Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. <sup>5</sup> Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. <sup>6</sup> So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

<sup>7</sup> Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. <sup>8</sup> Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. <sup>9</sup> So

Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

<sup>10</sup> Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: <sup>11</sup> "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." <sup>12</sup> So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

<sup>13</sup> Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. <sup>14</sup> If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

<sup>15</sup> Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup> "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die."

Folks, Mordecai, Esther, and their people had great reasons to **fear**. Haman was pushing for their destruction. But although *God's name is not mentioned once in the book of Esther*, God's presence and providence are clearly presented! So, what do I want you to remember from today's story? The main thing is this: Always **RALLY SUPPORT ... TO SHINE FOR GOD**. *You can't survive in this world on your own*, spiritually or otherwise! So, how do we do that—rally support to shine for God? Here's how God works—how God thinks...

**GOD DOESN'T WANT US TO FACE DOWN FEAR ALONE...** Mordecai wanted Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy for the Jewish people; this was scary because of the Persian law that said: "If you go before the king uninvited, you will be put to death—no exceptions!" So, what does Esther do as this 'spiritual opportunity' comes her way? How does she face down her fears in order to do God's will? Esther didn't do it alone, did she? Esther called on Mordecai & others to join her ... for fasting and prayer for three days; by doing this, she not only enlisted the help of others who loved her, but she invited God right smack into the middle of the situation too!

What's the point? As we make our way through this life, *we can't go it alone!* **Christianity's not a solo sport!** It's more like Olympic hockey, rather than Olympic figure skating. We're a part of Christ's *team*. Being a Christian means we're...

- Members of God's family...
- Sheep in his flock...
- Branches on his vine...
- Parts of his body...

We're a *community* together. Esther learned that; we need to learn that too. And, there's one more thing that I think we can learn from Esther's story; God doesn't want us to face down fear alone and...

**DON'T BE SURPRISED AT WHO GOD SENDS YOUR WAY TO HELP YOU THROUGH THOSE TIMES! Folks ... sometimes our ability to shine for God comes from the support of people we least expect...**

Consider this (and this is a true story)... Like any good mother, when Karen found out that another baby was on the way, she did what she could to help her 3-year-old son, Michael, prepare for a new sibling. They found out the new baby was going to be a girl, so Michael began to sing to his new baby sister night after night, day after day, in Mommy's tummy. He was building a bond of love with his sister before they even met...

Though Karen's pregnancy progressed normally, the labor pains (contractions) soon came, and then delivery. Some serious complications arose during delivery, however, and Karen wondered if she might have to have a C-section. Finally, after a long struggle, Michael's little sister was born in the hospital at Morristown, Tennessee ... but she was in very serious condition. With a siren howling in the night, the ambulance rushed the infant to the neonatal intensive care unit at St. Mary's Hospital in Knoxville...

The days went by slowly. The little girl got worse. The pediatrician had to tell the parents that there was little hope and to expect the worst. So, Karen and her husband had gone so far as to contact the local cemetery about a burial plot. They had a special room fixed up for their new baby in their house ... and now they were having to make plans for a funeral instead.

Michael, while all of this was going on, kept begging his parents to let him see his sister. "I want to sing to her," he kept saying. Week 2 in intensive care looked as though a funeral would come before the week was over. Michael kept nagging his parents about singing to his sister, but everyone knows that children aren't allowed in intensive care!

Finally, though, Karen decided to take Michael anyway—whether they liked it or not. If he didn't see his sister right now, he may never get the chance to see her alive. They dressed Michael in an over-sized scrub suit and marched him into ICU. He looked like a walking laundry basket! The head nurse recognized him as a child and immediately yelled, "Get that kid out of here now! No children are allowed!" Well, the *mother* rose up strong in Karen and the usually mild-mannered lady glared at the head nurse's face, her lips a firm line, and stated, "He's is not leaving here until he sees his sister!" And they marched right over to her bed...

Michael gazed over the side of the bed at his sister—the tiny infant who was losing the battle to live. After just a moment, the 3-year-old Michael began to sing to her ... just as he'd done while she was in her mother's womb. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray."

Instantly the baby seemed to respond. Her pulse rate began to calm down and become steady ... maybe for the first time since her birth. "Keep on singing, Michael," his mother encouraged him with tears in her eyes.

"You never know dear, how much I love you, please don't take my sunshine away." As Michael sang to his sister, the baby's ragged, strained breathing became as smooth as a kitten's purr. "Keep on singing, Sweetheart." "The other night, dear, as I lay sleeping, I dreamed I held you in my arms."

Michael's little sister began to relax as rest—healing rest—seemed to sweep over her. "Keep on singing, Michael." Tears had now begun to stream down the face of that bossy head nurse. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. Please don't take my sunshine away...."

The next day, the little girl was well enough to go home! *Woman's Day* magazine called it "The Miracle of a Brother's Song." The medical staff just called it 'a miracle.' Karen called it 'a miracle of God's love.'

Who would have known that God would send another child to be a part of the team to bring her little girl back to life? The ability to shine for God is sometimes given to us by the support of those we least expect (like God sending a baby at Christmas to save US)...

Folks, please remember: God doesn't want us to face down fear alone ... and, finally, support sometimes comes from those we least expect...

**We need to rally together & support one another to shine for God!** As we used to say on the high school football team when we were rallying together, "Huddle Up!" To be victorious in this world God has placed us in, we need to 'huddle up,' support one another, and allow God to shine through us all! It's time to shine in 2017!