



Finding Alien Allies

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By Rev. David Koch

Introduction:

Today is our third Sunday in this spiritual adventure entitled *More than Survivors, Learning How to Thrive*. The first week we talked about Moses and making soul-conscious decisions. Last week we talked about Joseph and fleeing all too convenient evil. This morning our teacher is a young woman named Esther. That 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. She was raised by her cousin Mordecai, who served as a minor government official. A king by the name of Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, was the leader of the Persian Empire. This most likely places the story approximately 500 years before the birth of Christ.

Vashti, the queen, embarrassed the king at a party, and he divorced her. He needed to select a new queen. Women from all over the empire were selected and given a twelve-month beauty treatment. After that year, each night a different woman was sent to the king's bedroom. When Esther's turn came, the next morning she became queen. I'm sure if the king knew she was Jewish, she wouldn't have received her crown. But Mordecai told her to keep her faith and ethnicity a secret.

To make a long story short (read the book of Esther for the complete story), Mordecai would not bow to one of the king's officials—the wicked Haman—and this enraged him. Haman got so incensed with Mordecai that he had a gallows built that was eighty-three feet high. Not only was he going to kill Mordecai, but every person of Jewish descent in the empire. Let's open our Bibles and pick up the story (read Esther 4:1–16).

Here is another soul alert opportunity. Mordecai, Esther, and their people had great reasons to fear. Haman was going to see to their destruction. Even though God's name is not mentioned once in the book of Esther, his presence and his providence are clearly presented. So, what should we remember this morning? Esther rallied support to shine for God. You and I need to do that too.

What can we learn from this story that we can apply in a practical sense to our lives?

I. We don't live in a bubble

First of all, Esther teaches us that God doesn't allow us to live in a bubble. Sometimes, Christians have the mistaken belief that once a person gives his or her life to Jesus, everything is going to be champagne and caviar. This is simply not true. When Esther found out that the wicked Haman was going to kill

her entire race, we read that she was in great distress. I'd call that an understatement. I'm sure she was in complete terror.

How about you? Do you believe God will never allow something scary to come into your life? **Jesus told his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you**

will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). I think Esther would have appreciated those words. The words of "Amazing Grace" remind us that we've been through "many dangers, toils, and snares."

Brothers and sisters, it's scary in this foreign setting. Remember we are aliens and foreigners here. Sometimes the journey for an alien gets a bit uncomfortable. When things are uncomfortable and scary, we have a great opportunity to face our fears and know that God is with us. We learn from Esther and the rest of the Scriptures that at all times God is with us. The psalmist doesn't indicate that we will be exempt from fearful surroundings, but he does tell us God will be right there with us. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows"(Psalm 23:4-5).

When you're scared for your children, your marriage, or your job, remember God is not surprised by our being scared. He sees the circumstances and knows the end from the beginning. What is comforting is that God is with us. He was with Moses when he had choices to make. God was with Joseph, helping him run from all-too-convenient evil. And most certainly, he was with Esther as she faced her fears and rallied support to shine for God. I'm reminded of with words from the prophet Isaiah "**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze" (Isaiah 43:2).**

II. God often puts us in strategic places.

Mordecai told Esther, ". . . Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" I believe that Esther became the Persian queen to save God's holy people from the wicked Haman. What a strategic place!

If Esther had been unwilling for God to use her, many of the Jewish people would have been slaughtered. But God ordered Esther's steps and she was in the right place, at the right time, for the right purpose.

God has put you and me in strategic places. For such a time as this, God has placed you in that school, in that office, in that neighborhood, in that ministry, in

your family. For such a time as this, maybe God has put you in a scary place. He's there with you and he has something for you to accomplish for his kingdom.

In the movie *Remember the Titans*, God put Coach Boone in a strategic place. It was scary. People were throwing rocks through his windows. He was insulted, threatened, and harassed. But lives were changed among black and white high school students, their families and an entire community.

This week, look for the soul alerts! God will permit some scary stuff. He will be with you. And you are in his strategic place.

III. God has given us one another for support

We also learn from Esther's example that God doesn't want us to face our fears alone. Mordecai wanted Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy for the Jewish people. This was scary. There was a law in Persia. If anyone went to the king without being invited, they risked their life. They could be put to death. Esther hadn't been summoned for a whole month. If the king did not extend his scepter to welcome her into his presence, it would be curtains for Esther. What does Esther do as this soul alert opportunity comes her way? How did she face her fears?

She realized she shouldn't face her fears alone. She needed help. She needed support. She needed a team behind her. All the Jews in the city of Susa, all of Esther's companions in the palace and everyone around her fasted with her for three days. I think the implication is that a lot of prayer went along with this fasting. It usually does in the Scriptures.

The point I'm trying to make is that in this foreign setting, we can't go it alone. Becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ is not a solo sport. It is a team effort. It happens best within the context of the family of God. Being a Christian means we're members of God's family, sheep in his flock, branches in his vine, parts of his body. We are part of a community of followers of Jesus Christ. We can't go it alone. Esther learned that. We need to learn it, too.

The writer of Ecclesiastes informs us that "**Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).**

Yes, two are better than one. When times get scary, when those soul alerts come to you in those strategic places, you are going to need someone to help you when the road gets rough. You need a prayer partner. You need to find another “alien.” What do I mean by that? Well, remember a few weeks ago we learned that believers in Christ are aliens and strangers on this earth. So, we need to find “alien allies,” other believers, to help us thrive spiritually. You’ll find more information about this application in your journals at the beginning of Week 3, which is today.

Here are some things we can do for and with one another, and what I suggest you to do with someone starting this week:

- 1. Pray for each other daily.**
- 2. Pray with each other weekly.**
- 3. Share a meal together.**
- 4. Share your life: struggles, joys, etc.**
- 5. Study and reflect on the Scriptures together.**

Conclusion:

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 that the new baby was going to be a girl, and day after day, night after night, Michael sang to his sister in Mommy’s tummy. He was building a bond of love with his little sister before he even met her. The pregnancy progressed normally for Karen, an active member of the Panther Creek United Methodist Church in Morristown, Tennessee. In time, the labor pains came. Soon it was every five minutes, every three, every minute. But serious complications arose during delivery, and Karen found herself in hours of labor. Would a C-section be required?

Finally, after a long struggle, Michael’s little sister was born. 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, Knoxville, Tennessee.

The days inched by. The little girl got worse. The pediatrician had to tell the parents there was very little hope, to be prepared for the worst. Karen and her husband contacted a local cemetery about a burial plot. They had fixed up a special room in their house for their new baby, but now they found themselves having to plan for a funeral.

Michael, however, 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 if a funeral would come before the week was over. Michael kept nagging about singing to his sister, but kids are never allowed in intensive care.

Karen decided to take Michael, whether they liked it or not. If he didn’t see his sister right then, he might never see her alive. They dressed him in an oversized scrub suit and marched him into ICU. He looked like a walking laundry basket. The head nurse recognized him as a child and bellowed, “Get that kid out of here now. No children are allowed.” The mother rose up strong in Karen, and the usually mild-mannered lady glared steel-eyed right into the head nurse’s face, her lips a firm line. “He is not leaving until he sings to his sister,” she stated.

6. Be accountable to each other.

7. Maintain confidentiality.

This week, would you get together with an alien ally? Maybe you’re doing this! Great, keep going. Maybe you tried and you’ve gotten off track. That’s okay, this week you can climb back on. Maybe you’ve never had a prayer partner.

Let me share something with you. I’ve faced some scary places in my 30 years of ministry. If it hadn’t been that I believed I was in God’s strategic spot and had some praying people supporting me, I don’t know if I’d be here today. Following God hasn’t always been comfortable. Following God certainly hasn’t always been easy. If I were flying solo, I would have crashed and burned by now. But there is a team of prayer warriors that pray for me and this ministry. In fact there is a team of prayer partners that are praying for me and this service right now. If it weren’t for them, I’d be mush on the runway! Please, find and meet with a prayer partner this week.

I close with this true story that shows how much we need each other.

Then Karen towed Michael to his sister's bedside. He gazed at the tiny infant losing the battle to live. After a moment, he began to sing. In the pure-hearted voice of a 3-year-old, Michael sang: "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray."

Instantly, the baby girl seemed to respond. The pulse rate began to calm down and become steady. "Keep on singing, Michael," encouraged Karen, 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 conquered the face of the bossy head nurse. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. Please don't take my sunshine away."

The next day, the very 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.

This week recognize that we all can rally support to shine for God where we are.