

# Coach House Church **BEACONS**

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## **G O D S   C H A M P I O N S   P T 1**

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It's been a strange old year hasn't it? Usually we'd have been watching 'wimbledon' urging on our champion, groaning when they missed and cheering after another amazing rally where you thought – they'll never reach that return, they can't stretch for that ball surely!

There are numerous sporting events where we are thrilled and amazed at just how skilled and talented some of the contestants are. We like to see a champion succeed and even more to see the underdog come good, beating the opposition or proving themselves against the clock or their previous best time.

Well, the bible has champions in it as well. Some obviously spring to mind such as: Joshua- with the mighty destruction of the walls of Jericho, or Gideon- seeing off the enemy forces with a smashed pot, a flame and a trumpet. Others are not so obvious. If you have never read the story of Esther then now is the time to do so. It is one of the best stories of intrigue, overcoming evil, standing up for the truth and ultimately shining bright in dark times- being a champion for those who are treated with disregard.

The story goes – The Jews were in exile in Persia. King Xerxes was on the throne and he liked to show off his extensive wealth and throw lavish parties for dignitaries that bordered his lands. Chapter one describes him displaying his wealth for 180 days followed by a 7 day banquet in the palace gardens. All was going well, until the King demanded that his Queen Vashti be paraded in front of his guests. She refused point blank which humiliated him in front of influential guests. As a result, his advisors suggested looking for another queen to replace her. He had to save face.

This all sets the scene for Mordecai, one of the exiles from Jerusalem when Judah was overtaken by King Nebuchadnezzar. Mordecai cared for his cousin who had been orphaned. Her name was Esther. When he saw the edict from the King, he arranged for Esther to be taken to the palace, to become a candidate as the new queen, along with many others who seized the opportunity to improve their lot. Mordecai was wise and told Esther, in chapter 2 verse 10, not to reveal her nationality and family background. His wisdom was to prove crucial later in the story.

The young Jewish girl had beauty treatments, nutritious food and lovely clothing provided. In turn she was liked by everyone who met her. After 10 months she was presented before the King who saw her great beauty and decided to crown her as his Queen. Still he did not know her background at all. And throughout, Mordecai had sat daily outside the palace gates, sending messages to Esther and checking she was safe and looked after.

One day, Mordecai overheard a plot by two guards to assassinate the King. His clear minded approach was to inform Esther who would in turn tell the King. The plot was overturned and Mordecai's name was recorded in honour of his actions. The twist in this story comes with the royal appointment of Haman, a high ranking noble official of the King. He demanded an unfounded respect from everyone, an expectation that every knee would bow before him. However, Mordecai, could not comply with this and on discovering that he was Jewish, Haman's unreasonable response was to plan and plot against the whole Jewish community.

What began as a rags to riches story swiftly turns into a fight against evil, of racist attitudes and of disregard for any sort of human equality. The words in verse 8 almost make the blood boil –

8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

It spells immediate danger and disaster as the plan set forth was to annihilate all the exiles on a given date. Immediately, Mordecai dressed in sackcloth and ashes, wailing bitterly. It came to Esther's attention and she learned of the attack, so sent messages to her cousin Mordecai. His responses are some of the most prominent words in this portion of scripture. In chapter 6 it says:

"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape.<sup>14</sup> For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" For such a time as this. The plan throughout Esther. God's plan throughout the Old testament, The plan to preserve a family line so that one day Jesus would be born, the Messiah, the Saviour of both the Jews and the gentiles.

Esther's bravery shines through in that she determines to bring up the matter of her people with the King. Her wisdom learned at the side of Mordecai also comes to the fore. She doesn't rush in and demand, which would incur certain death. Instead she ensures that the King is ready to listen to her request whilst at the same time Haman is lulled into a false sense of security. Read chapter 5 and you can feel the self confidence of Haman who thinks he is to be honoured while in the background he is still plotting to kill Mordecai. One night, the King can't sleep and asks for the chronicles, the record of events during his reign. He suddenly realises that the man who revealed the assassination attempt was never honoured for doing so and he decides to remedy the situation in the morning.

Finally, all the strands of the story twist together. Haman is busy dreaming of his own importance which belies an evil intent. Thinking he is about to be honoured he lists numerous prizes and then the King directs Haman to: 10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

The King is desperate to please his Queen and will provide anything she asks for. 3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.

Her request was granted and Haman was impaled on a pole 50 feet in the air. The destruction did not take place.

What is amazing about this story is that God is not directly mentioned but there is no doubt that God's hand is weaving throughout. How did Mordecai even consider sending Esther into the lair of the King? How did Esther manage to be so brave? How did they both keep their calm and stick to a plan that could tip on a knife edge?

Both Mordecai and Esther were absolute champions. Under such extreme conditions, how would we fare? Esther risked death herself by approaching the King and being so outspoken.

What else do we learn from the story of Esther?

Wealth and power are no obstacle to God's plans. It is not acceptable to treat people with disregard depending on their background, to look down on and disrespect those who are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). No matter how grim the circumstances, how impossible the situation appears to be, the hand of God is never far away. God is Sovereign now as he always has been because he does not change his character. Also, that God has a plan for everyone as it says in John 3:16 and that through Jesus' sacrifice we can now approach Almighty God and ask for his help, no matter how big the problem is.

Psalm 46 begins:

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,  
always ready to help in times of trouble.
- 2 So we will not fear when earthquakes come  
and the mountains crumble into the sea.
- 3 Let the oceans roar and foam.  
Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

And ends with:

- "Be still, and know that I am God!  
I will be honored by every nation.  
I will be honored throughout the world."
- 11 The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us;  
the God of Israel is our fortress.



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