

Book of Esther

Opportunity

Fifty years after the first contingent of Zionists returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel providence was at work again in Persia. Evil forces were beginning to heat up the caldron of anti-Semitism and were plotting to exterminate the remaining population of Jews. It is a wonder of history that the Jews should so often be singled out and marked for extinction. Only the spiritually enlightened can begin to understand that history is the story of a single war between good and evil of which there are many battles. The Jewish race has been chosen by God to play a unique role in mankind's redemption. It is no wonder to the reader of faith that there is such an antagonism between light and darkness. Persia would, like many before her, try to do the impossible: stand in the way of providence.

While the Book of Esther does not mention the name of God, we can amidst the pages feel His presence. Providence enjoins the laws of justice, not only to deliver God's children, but to crush him who dares to lift his hand against God's anointed. In the little history book of Esther Jewish children learn of God's care and have for twenty-five hundred years told and retold the story of God's deliverance.

Providence is the eternal hand of God leading his children through the tempest of time preserving them, caring for them, and guiding them along the way. While the children of Zerubbabel were seeing their children's children play in the streets of Jerusalem, God was also watching over an orphan girl who would become a kind-of Jewish Joan of Arc. Her armor would be only the garments of a meek spirit, and her protection the simple shield of faith. This is the story of Esther.

It would be impossible for any mortal to explain how God could use a drunken pagan king, and the noble virtue of a modest woman to set the stage for Esther to enter the sacred drama of world history, but so it happened. At the beginning of his rule King Ahasuerus (known to Plutarch and other worldly historians as Xerxes) orchestrated a six month celebration that was to be culminated with an orgy of oriental excess, opulence, and display of ostentation.

On the seventh day of a seven day drinking party wine clouded any reasonableness Ahasuerus might have had, and drowned his better judgment. Having shown all his wealth, his power, as well as his decadence to his guests, he finally thought to place a precious jewel upon display before a jaded company of intoxicated companions. He summoned his wife Vashti to come unveiled that men might envy and (no doubt) lust as they looked on her beauty. Vashti refused to come and the king lost face before his company.

A wife's beauty is meant to be only for her husband. How foolish men can be, how base how vile. How dark the dark of a man although a monarch, if he is in a world without God. Yet even in this dark palace in Susa there was a light of virtue burning in the heart of Vashti, to say nothing of courage that was worthy of a Queen. Only eternity will tell what were her thoughts and reasons for not obeying an order from the despot of Persia. Only in heaven will God explain how a queen's virtue was seemingly overruled by a more powerful king's vanity, and she lost her situation, her station, and her home. Here on this side of eternity we must simply trust in the goodness of God who is "working all things together for good." The persuasion of seven chamberlains were not sufficient to convince her to debase herself. As she stepped aside she created a vacuum into which would step a saviour. She would decrease and Esther would increase.

Would we gladly step down in order that another of God's choosing might step up? There came a day when David's rising star dimmed the sunshine of Saul's. The moody king had some happiness



until he heard the lyrics of a song popular in the streets of Israel “*Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*” (1Sam 18:7). The green monster stung Saul’s heart and envy, like a gangerous scourge, gripped his soul tightly till his dying day. “*And Saul eyed enviously David, from that day and onward*” (1Sam. 18:9). Vashti stepped aside and another took her place.

In the book of Acts, Barnabas, the son of consolation, made room for Paul only to watch as providence began to shine more brightly on his disciple until the man of Tarsish became an apostle to apostles. We can not know or judge Vashti, nor dare we question the wisdom or “fairness” of God. Faith simply trusts. Faith rejoices in the light of providence even when that light shines upon another.

Embarrass a king at your own peril. Ahasuerus needed to save face. (It was in Herod’s face saving that John met with his head-losing (Matt. 14). The king’s advisors feared a revolt of all womendom (Est. 1:16-18). It was deemed that such independence by the queen could only result in a general unrest in homes throughout the land. If a woman, it was reasoned, could ignore an order from the king, why should any wife yield to men of much lower station. It was decided that a law should be made and decreed throughout the land: that women shall “honor their husbands,” be they great or small. How foolish is the man who thinks he can demand or legislate love. How foolish to think honor and respect comes to those who have not first earned it. How vain are titles when conferred upon the vile. How impotent are laws to generate grace and graciousness. Love cannot be demanded, it must be freely given. Honor must be deserved, come to full term and be born naturally, for as with the spiritual “new birth” respect must freely come, and any attempt to “take” what is not yet ready will result in the death of respect rather than the life. We have reached a dismal state of affairs when we must make laws in an attempt to govern the kingdom of the heart, but so it happened in Susa. The king “*sent letters into all the provinces, into every province according to its writing, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people*” (Est. 1:22). Yet it is a fact that the heart that is not ruled and governed by the love of God, needs be acquainted with the law of God which is a constant reminder of the heart’s rebellious condition. While God’s own fifth commandment tells children to honor their mother and their father, only love can make it so, for the law itself is incapable of changing as single heart or saving a single soul.

As a search was being made throughout the kingdom for a new queen the divine historian singles out the simple home of a man known to us as Mordecai and his orphaned niece named Esther. Mordecai was a survivor of the second deportation that swept up ten thousand Jews along with Jeconiah the king (2Kings 24:6). His uncle fared not so well but died, but Esther who grew up motherless and fatherless, did not grow up godless. She had a pious uncle who seemed to possess an spiritual alertness and wisdom that would guide her through the heady waters of success and the treacherous channels of political intrigue. Even Hebrew orphans have a chance in this world. Even motherless children have hope because there is a Gracious God in heaven who is moving the winds of providence.

Esther found herself caught up in the net of circumstances and became a candidate to fill the vacant seat as queen of the most powerful nation on earth (2:8). Seven hand-maids catered and cared for Esther who had been made (again by providence) to be most beautiful. God has made us what we are. Esther could have been born anywhere in the world. She was born in Persia. She might have been born a pagan. She was born of pious Jews. She might have been born lame as much as lovely, plain as much as pretty, dim witted instead of bright. Wise is the man who takes the gifts God gives and makes the most of them caring not that others may be more equipped or endowed. God is the potter we are the clay. Each vessel is made for the Master’s use. Well said the Psalmist, “*I would rather be a door keeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in tents of wickedness*” (Ps. 84:10). When first singled out by Xerxes her heart is more likely to have sunk than soared, her beauty considered more a curse than a blessing, but she would make the most of what life handed her. We should likewise learn to work the field we are given to plow.

This is the story of a unique opportunity recognized, taken, and used for the glory of God. Each of us has unique opportunities custom made by God’s omniscience that pass within our reach every



day. Sometimes they knock only once at our door. The spiritually sensitive soul needs hear but one rap at the gate and they rush to welcome the opportunity the Lord has sent our way. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me.”* Those dull in spirit fail to hear angels pounding on the door even as grace tried to evacuate the souls from Sodom.

On an appointed day when Esther had to appear before the King she had no aids but heaven’s aid (2:16). We sometimes speak of people having “presence.” There is a certain beauty that comes with the presence of God that radiates not from without, but from within. There is a light that glows not from the surface, but from a certain inner “something” that comes with God’s presence. The Bible tells us that *“the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen...”* (2:18).

Opportunity bestows many crowns upon those who would bow their heads. It is not for us to aspire to sit in high places but, should we be asked to come to the head of the table, let us humbly take our place while we pray to the God of providence asking only that we be worthy of the vocation to which we are called (Lk. 14:7-11; Eph. 4:1).

