

**Sermon Notes of  
Assistant Pastor Fred Stevens' Sermon on September 26, 2021:**

**"Alpha and Omega  
(Esther 7:1-10, 9:20-22)"**

**[In today's sermon, Assistant Pastor Fred Stevens, at church in the Y, shows us that in dealing with all the difficulties of life, we can have comfort because God is the Alpha and Omega in our lives.]**

Introduction:

- Now, we've all heard that term, "alpha and omega"? Right?
- It's in the scriptures, but where.
- It's found in Revelation, but where?
- It's found in chapter 1 and chapter 22, which is the beginning and the end of the book.
  
- Now, here's another question: what does Alpha and Omega mean?
- Members' response:
  - It means God is the most powerful deity in the universe.
  - God has started everything and He's going to finish everything.
  
- If you Google this phrase, you'll find out that it was a 2010 computer animated movie about two baby wolves named Alpha and Omega.
- Alpha and omega is also a term used to mean "everything or know it all."
- Now, interestingly, alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.
  
- Here are some ways the phrase alpha and omega describe God:
  - He is the Beginning and End.
  - He is the Start and He is the Destination.
  - He is the Source and He is the Result.
  - He is Everything.
  - And finally, He is the Purpose of Life.
  
- Now we're all concerned about the purpose of our lives – and the real purpose of our life is God.
- God is ever present with us even through all our twists and turns that we experience in our lives as we go through trials and problems.
- Fred read a beautiful statement that said, "Here is this big beautiful world full of ugly problems and God says, 'And I am with you throughout all of it.'"
  
- Yes, we need to be reminded of the reality that God is in everything that we are going through.
- So, as we deal with our difficulties, we should take courage that God is with us.
- We need to remember what Joshua told us, "Be thou strong and be very courageous for the eternal God is with you wherever you go."
- Now, one of the most interesting examples of being courageous during the twists and turns of life and being with God all through it is the story of Esther.

- What an amazing person she was.

### Background of Esther's story:

- First of all, she and the Israelites were in captivity in Persia, which was a giant kingdom that extended from India to Ethiopia.
- And the current king, King Xerxes, had tremendous power.
- Unbelievably, there were probably millions of people in this kingdom, which existed around 400 BC.
- Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, resided in the capital city of Susa.
- In this great kingdom, they had a law that was called the "Law of the Medes and Persians."
- There are all kinds of rules related to this law and are brought out in the book of Esther.
- And one of those rules that when the king made a decree, and he put his official ring signature on it, it could not be changed, it could not be reversed.
- Now, interestingly, some of the guards stationed at the front gate, where Mordecai worked, had a plan to kill the king.
- And Mordecai managed to get this information to Esther, who lived inside the palace and told the king about it, which he then overthrew the plot.
- There is also this character, Haman, whom Esther called "that wicked Haman" had all kinds of designs politically.
- Because of all these things going on, there is a lot of political danger around the palace because there was a lot of power struggles and a lot of selfishness.
- For Esther to live there was just amazing.

### Lessons from Esther:

- She endured many difficulties and hardships – twists and turns in her journey of life.
- First of all, she was an orphan.
- Her cousin, Mordecai, then took Esther in and raised her.
- Now, the current queen, Queen Vashti, was banished by the king, because of her actions.
- And so, the princes asked King Xerxes, because of his loneliness, to send out a decree for beautiful young women to become his concubines and so that he might find a new queen among them.
- And guess what happened to Esther? Since she was good looking, she was taken away from Mordecai and taken into the palace as a concubine.
- She was virtually imprisoned in that concubine system.
- And through all of this, she sought wise counsel and sought to do the right thing.
- She sent messages to Mordecai and asked his advice because she respected his wisdom.
- Now, as we go through twists and turns in our lives, do we seek wise counsel?
- And as she went through all of this, Esther was also seeking what God was leading her to do.

- Now at one point in her life, Mordecai told Esther to go to the king and ask him to stop this terrible decree that Haman brought about that was going to result in death to all the Jews.
- Now, this was a terrible risk for Esther to do that, even though King Xerxes had made her queen after.
- Her first response was to send a message back to Mordecai for him to tell all the Jews to fast with her because she was seeking God's guidance in this traumatic situation.
- Esther, by connecting with God, was seeking to do the right thing.
- What an example for us where we need to seek to do the right thing by seeking out God's will for us.
- Now, the Law of the Medes and Persians said that if you went before the king to ask a request, when you weren't invited, that was the death penalty, unless the king tipped his scepter toward you.
- So, going to the king, Esther knew she was taking a great risk, even though she had been crowned queen after she had become part of the king's concubines.
- She was a very courageous woman, because she realized that in doing this, she could perish.
- Nevertheless, she went before the king, for the sake of her people.
- She had nothing to gain for herself by doing this, because she was already living in the palace as a concubine.
- So, her motive was unselfish, which is an interesting challenge for all of us as we go through the twists and turns of our life.
- Wow, this is quite a lot to learn from what Esther did.
- So, Esther went before the king to make her request and the king was delighted in her and gave her his grace and favor.
- Esther then invited the king and Haman to a special dinner. And they came.
- And during the dinner, the king told Esther that she could have whatever she wanted even up to half of his kingdom.
- And she said, "All I want is for you and Haman to come to dinner again tomorrow night."
- Now Haman thought he was special, because he was coming to dinner again with the king, especially since he had managed to get the king to sign a decree that on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of the next month, all the Jews are going to be killed.
- Haman did this because he despised Mordecai, because the king wanted to honor him for telling him about the plot of the front gate guards who wanted to kill the king.
- So, Haman devised a decree that would not only kill Mordecai but all his Jewish people.
- But, Haman didn't realize that Esther was a Jew, as well.

**Esther 7:1-6 (NRSV), So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. 2) On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."**

- What a temptation this is for Esther to respond in a self-fulfilling way.
- But, she maintained her humility and her wisdom.

**3) Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me – that is my petition – and the lives of my people – that is my request.**

- Esther gave her heartfelt request for her people.

**4) For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” 5) Then King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” 6) Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.**

- Now, earlier, when Haman was planning to kill Mordecai, he had built gallows out by the front gates of the palace.
- Now, today, we think of gallows as a place with a rope and noose or a lance with a knife blade.
- But this gallows was a place with sharpened stumps or sharpened stakes.
- So the means of execution here was impalement.

**Esther 7:9, Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs (special guards) in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” 10) So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.**

- Now, the decree that had been declared that the Jews would be wiped out and that decree could not be changed because it would break the rule of the Medes and the Persians.
- So, King Xerxes asked Esther and Mordecai to come up with a plan and he would sign it.
- Now, their inspired plan was that on those days, if anyone attacks the Jews, they have the right to defend themselves.
- Normally, you don’t have the right to defend yourself against a king’s decree.
- And when this new decree got out, the Jews prepared to defend themselves.
- And as a result of all of this, fewer Jews were attacked.
- Even though the Jews were held in captivity, they were given special circumstances which made certain others wanting to become Jews, so they could defend themselves.
- So, what God accomplishes is truly amazing.
- Now, it was an established fact given when you defended yourself against those who attacked you, you could plunder them when you were victorious.
- But the Jews didn’t do any plundering, in other words they weren’t selfish in their actions.

**Esther 9:20, Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21) enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year,**

- Now, the thirteenth was the day the Jews were to be attacked and so this new decree said that two days after the 13<sup>th</sup>, we going to make them a perpetual celebration about how the Jews have been delivered.
- And these two days are known as Purim, which is still celebrated today by the Jews.

**22) as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.**

- Now, these are just the highlights of this story – one should take the time and read the entire book of Esther.
- Also, what is so interesting are the messages that Esther and Mordecai passed along to each other once Esther was living in the palace.
- When Mordecai asked her to beseech the king about the decree against the Jews, she said that he was asking her to do something very dangerous.
- And Mordecai responded, “Esther, you may have been brought into this situation for a time such as this.”
- In essence Mordecai was telling Esther that in the twists and turns of her life, God may have brought her into this situation so that she could be an important part of delivering their people.
- Sometimes we are in this position of friendship or relationship with others for a special reason.

#### Concluding comments:

- Now, this story about Esther gives us a lot of interesting lessons and opportunities to think about, as we go through our journey of life from beginning to end.
- So, we should take heart and have courage for God is with us in everything.
- But in doing that, we should seek to walk humbly.
- We should always seek first the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of ourselves or any other person or any government or any organization.
- What should be first in our lives is the Kingdom of God.
- Now when Jesus said in Matthew, “Seek first the Kingdom of God”, it was in context of all our daily needs.
- Jesus was telling us that when we first seek the Kingdom of God, all our needs will be taken care of.
- Now the end of the story here is that Mordecai becomes the king’s wingman, his right hand guy.
- And the king is also very, very happy with Esther.
- It’s interesting that all the things these two didn’t have were provided to them.
- And the Jews had reason to celebrate even though they were in captivity.
- This story shows us that the Lord provides for all.
- Now, we don’t control how God will influence or intervene in events or in other people’s lives.

- Obviously, we don't control what God does in other people's lives.
- But our role is to focus on God, and as we follow how he leads us, He does more things in other people's lives and in the world in general.
  
- Now, because Esther and Mordecai yielded to God, He was able to use them to save the Jewish people.
- So, we should focus on Him – the Alpha and the Omega, not on the difficulties of the twists and turns of life.
- Now, all of us may be where we are for a time such as this that we're involved in.
- God is the Alpha and Omega - He is the purpose of our lives!

Closing prayer