

## Message 1: The Invisible Hand

### **SUGGESTED PASSAGE:** ESTHER 1:1—2:23

Esther is unique in all the Bible because it is the only book in Scripture that does not mention the name of God directly. This is because Esther is a book God wanted to use to show how His providence, His invisible hand, works behind the scene to bring about His purposes in history. So even though God is not on the front page of Esther, His fingerprints are all through the book.

So even though God is not named in the book of Esther, look for His covert hand at work. This book wants us to know that God is in control, but His methods vary.

### **MESSAGE GOAL:**

The goal of this message is to help people discern the invisible hand of God's providence at work in their circumstances—even when they cannot detect His presence—to bring about His sovereign, perfect plan in their lives.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

One day, a very lonely frog went to a fortune-teller to see what his fortune would be. The fortune-teller told the frog, "Don't worry because soon you're going to meet a girl who will want to know everything about you."

The frog was understandably excited, so he asked the fortune-teller, "When will I meet this girl?"

"Oh, you're going to meet her next semester in biology class!"

Sometimes, things look good one minute, but then go south very fast. Sometimes, if the truth be told, dreams take place in one moment, and disaster seems to come the next. Sometimes, it even looks like God doesn't know what He is doing.

The biblical book of Esther is a lot like that. It's actually a Cinderella story—and much like Cinderella, before Esther becomes "the belle of the ball," things become very dark and seemingly hopeless for her and her people. This plot alone makes Esther unique in Scripture.

Esther is also unique among the sixty-six books of the Bible because it is the only book in God's Word that does not contain the name of God. God's presence is on every page of Esther, but His name is nowhere to be found, which raises the question of why God would include in His Word a book that never mentions His name.

The reason is that God wanted to use this "Cinderella story" to teach us something about Himself that is critical for your life and mine, which is this: there are many times in our lives when God is nowhere to be found. There are many times in our circumstances when we look for God, but He cannot be located. There are many times when it seems that God is letting things happen to us that He wouldn't allow if He loved us and cared about us. And He doesn't seem to be present when these painful circumstances are happening to us.

But there is a term for God's invisibility, when He cannot be located. It is referred to in biblical theology as the doctrine of His *providence*: God's unseen hand at work. Esther is probably the classic example of God's unseen hand at work as He providentially rules and overrules when circumstances seem to be taking shape that would result in the destruction of His people, the Jews.

In fact, Esther is so permeated with God's providence that without knowing the reason it was included in the canon, the book makes no sense, other than it being a great story. But Esther was put in the Bible to teach you and me something about God that all of us face at one time or another, which is that He is present and at work even when our circumstances are falling apart and God seems nowhere to be found.

But when you understand the truth that God is providentially at work, you're able to move through life even when it's quiet spiritually in your life because you know even though you can't see, feel or hear God, He is pulling the strings behind the scenes as the great puppet-master.

The providence of God is a subset of another doctrine, His sovereignty, which refers to God's absolute power and rule over all of His creation. The sovereign God whose name does not appear in the book of Esther is present and working on every page. So, we must get our theology straight first before we can appreciate the message of Esther.





## SERMON POINTS:

### **1. GOD WANTS US TO KNOW THAT HE IS FIRMLY AND SOVEREIGNLY IN CONTROL OF ALL OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.**

- Sovereignty is one of God's chief attributes, stated clearly by Paul in Ephesians 1:11.
- Nothing that happens to us escapes God's careful attention because He is shaping our lives to bring Him glory (Romans 11:36).

### **2. PROVIDENCE IS GOD AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES TO CONTROL SITUATIONS.**

- God's providence is the miraculous and often mysterious way He intersects and interconnects people and events to bring about His sovereign will and purposes—what He wants to happen.
- The Scriptures abound with the truth of God's providence, even though the word is not used: Psalm 33:10-11; Proverbs 16:9; 19:21; 21:30; Isaiah 45:15. God grants human beings freedom, but He will not allow that freedom to thwart His sovereignty.
- Providence is often mysterious. We may not see God's hand at work, but He is the puppet-master, pulling the strings and controlling the action by either causing or allowing things to happen.

### **3. GOD ARRANGES CIRCUMSTANCES AND PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS SOVEREIGN WILL.**

- Esther's story reveals that God will providentially either cause or allow things to happen that may be in

contradiction to what He wants in order to achieve His ultimate, sovereign plan.

- When these things happen, God overrules even the evil that people do to accomplish His goal.
- When you begin to understand God's sovereignty and His providential ways of achieving His will, you can be conscious of God's fingerprints even when He seems absent. Because of this, we can trust God even when we cannot trace His hand at work in our lives.

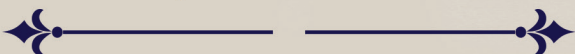
### **4. WHEN WE CAN'T SEE GOD IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THERE IS FAR MORE HAPPENING THAN WHAT WE CAN SEE.**

- God recorded the story of Esther so you can apply its truths to your circumstances as you grow to understand and appreciate God's sovereignty and respond correctly to it.
- Look at God's providence at work in Esther: a family conflict, a cultural battle between the sexes, a law in a secular culture that can't be changed, and a beauty contest—none of which has anything to do with God's will being accomplished—or does it?
- God uses Esther's circumstances to achieve His greater purpose. He is the puppet-master, pulling the strings behind the scenes to work all things according to "the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11).

### **5. GOD CAN EVEN ORCHESTRATE A COMPLETELY SEPARATE "SUBPLOT" BEHIND THE MAIN SCENES OF THE STORY TO LINE UP CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE BLESSING AND DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE.**

- Esther relays the plot to the king in Mordecai's name.
- Ahasuerus is going to be very grateful to Mordecai the Jew.





## SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS:

### COOKING UP A GREAT RECIPE

The story in the book of Esther is put together in much the same way a cake is baked. The baker takes butter, eggs, perhaps nutmeg, flour and sugar—ingredients that by themselves are not very enjoyable. You do not put a tablespoon of flour or nutmeg or even sugar in your mouth by themselves. But when the baker blends these ingredients together, pours the mix into a cake pan, and puts the fire of an oven underneath it—umm, umm good! You wind up with a cake, something delightful. That's because what is produced is bigger and better than the individual ingredients that make it up. What this means for your life is that God in His providence can take the nutmeg of your situation, the butter of your circumstances, the flour of your failure and the sugar of your successes, mix them together in His sovereign blender, and come out with a "cake" that tastes great, because His sovereignty is achieved through His providence.

## BACKGROUND BIBLICAL HISTORY AND CULTURE:

The Medo-Persian empire forms the backdrop for the unfolding of God's providential salvation of His people from annihilation. One feature of this empire is that any law the king made could never be reversed, which seemed to seal the Jews' fate. But the decree by which King Ahasuerus made provision for the Jews' slaughter was just another string in the Puppet-Master's hands.

## QUOTES BY DR. TONY EVANS:

"There are many times in our lives when God is nowhere to be found. There are many times when we look for God, but He cannot be located. There are many times when it seems like God is letting things happen to you and me that He wouldn't allow if He loved us and cared about us. But there is a term for God's invisibility, when He cannot be located. That term is His providence, His unseen hand at work."

"When you know the truth of God's sovereign control, and how He providentially works in history, you'll be able to move through life successfully even when it's quiet spiritually. That's because you know even though you don't see, feel, or hear from God, you know He is pulling the strings behind the scenes."

"Because God is the Puppet-Master, from now on you should no longer say the devil is in the details. Once you know about the providence of God, you need to now say God is in the details."

