

POKÉMON +++

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There was a woman who lost her parents tragically, and she ended up having to be adopted and taken care of by a cousin. And not only did that horrific tragedy happen, but then they ended up having to move to a different region and a different land that neither of them knew. Now by the provision of God, they ended up finding favor and great love by a very wealthy family, a family of great authority and a great power. And she became one who was deeply connected with that family, and especially the head of the family.

What she ended up discovering, though, is many within the family and in the circles of the family were not nice people at all. As a matter of fact, they were trying to do what we would call today still wicked and evil things. They had plans that wanted to just make them in greater provision and greater wealth and greater status at the expense, even if it cost other people their lives, they didn't really care of others. And she had the courage to expose their plan and to save and to help people with that.

Now I'll be honest with you, this is not an internet story. This is not some story that I said what would help me with a good opener for a message. This is the life of Esther in the Bible. And over the next month, we're going to discover how Esther's life is a witness and a spotlight to the life of Jesus, but also a witness and a spotlight for you and for me and how we live our lives.

And so as we journey together through this month, we're going to journey discovering how this person was used by God to save his people who were being plotted to be killed. And we're going to do that through our series Game On, which is an invitational series where we're going to look at games that you may know, you may not know, that you may love, you may not love. We're going to look at Pokemon, and we're going to look at Stardew Valley. We're going to look at some time-treasured games like Monopoly and Uno. And then we're going to end with a game that just is, that follows something that is worldwide attention for a short season, one month about, and is every four years FIFA.

Now you might be saying to yourself, you know, I love that we're in the book of Esther, but I don't understand why we have to use something like video games or board games to get there. Please understand that God is a God who uses many avenues to open a door that shine a spotlight and a witness on his love. And you even see this in the book of Esther. Esther is one of only two books, Esther as well as the Song of Solomon, that have zero mention of God. You will not find the name of God in the book.

But yet if you read Esther, every single verse and every single chapter has a prefigurement of the Christ and has a plan, a provision, a protection, and a deliverance story within it by the God of the world, our God, her God, your God. And that's why we do what we do.

And so also, we're starting this week with Pokemon, which has just been great attraction and fanfare. It started in 1996. We're not going to spend a whole lot of time, like, with the history on it, I'm not going

to spend a lot of time talking to you about Pikachu or Ash Ketchum or Misty or Brock or Team Rocket, but we do know that Pokemon is a very famous game right now.

We're going to talk about it. Actually, yesterday, Target was giving away Pokemon tote bags for free to everyone. My wife who works at Target, I said to her, can you just get them to put the King of Kings logo on the Target? And she said, she's just not that high up yet. She's getting there. I keep telling her.

But today, what I do want you to discover, and there's going to be a lot of fun things for you today, for you to invite people with and make sure everyone today takes home one of those fidgets as well. But on your chairs, you have your guide for Esther. And this is the guide we'd invite you to use. This will talk about the Esther story and share a little bit of truths that we're not going to get to in each message, but also note section where you'll be able to take notes for today.

And what we're going to discover through this month is we're going to look and what we're going to see today specifically too is that Esther was a person who was orphaned. She was adopted there, that she was a person who was struggling to believe what God was putting before her and yet followed into that. She was a person who was ready and trained to go out and was chosen before she was even seen about it. And she was a person who was set on a route.

Much like the Pokemon story, which begins with a hometown with, with no home and yet just dropped into a place where a professor gives you something before you even know what it is, where you have a training card to be able to go and do the route that you've been given.

So today, what I want us to journey through is I want us to understand like Esther and as disciples of God, what it looks like to know and what it feels like as being an outsider. What it means to be called before we're even competent for our calling. The amazing reality that you were chosen before you were even seen. And that small starts meaning no matter where you're at and no matter what it started to look like in this economy and in the life of God, it means that we've got greater opportunities that are ahead.

Fourth of July is one of those core memories in my life. It was the holiday of holidays for our family growing up. We would, we would come to my aunt and uncle's house and they had a pool and there was always food and it was just a great time and we would relax and in the heat of the California sun, it was one of the best experiences that I would always look forward to every single year and then it would end with fireworks in front of the driveway and celebrations and we were out super late.

It was also the time that I just always remember my mom would never remember to put sunscreen on me as a kid and so I would just come home like hot and baked on my shoulders, red as can be and water blisters would be soon coming in a few days. But the core memory is pretty much good with the exception of that.

But I remember one year where we got to meet a cousin for the very first time and it wasn't as a baby, it was as a seven or eight year old and we were probably ten or eleven and my aunt and uncle had been praying about, we didn't know this, I didn't know this, but they were praying and trying to foster and to adopt a child and finally they got one.

They had two boys, older boys from a different relationship, but this was going to be their first child together. And this seven year old boy was dropped in on our party and he had come and been given to them a few weeks earlier and he felt like an outsider. He had as a seven year old no clue of our rhythms, routines, of all these cousins that would get together and had like insider language and all these things that we had done and not seen each other but now gathered back together and there he is with all his baggage, all his hurts, all his problems, all the things and yet dropped into this life with a house, with a pool and all these fun things and all these people. He felt like an outsider.

Pokemon begins where you're just dropped in to this hometown with no ability to know, no badges, nothing ready to go, you have nothing, you're an outsider not knowing what to do next. Esther had this feeling as an outsider in Esther 2, 5 and 7.

Now there was in this citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shammai, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin, king of Judah.

Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who was Esther, who had been brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

So she not only has lost her mom and dad and now is being raised by her cousin Mordecai but she is now in exile with all the Jews and coming into the land of Susa, lost everything. A true orphan. Matter of fact, I want everyone everywhere to say, she was an orphan.

And yet, God put her into the life of Mordecai and into the life of Susa and into this kingdom. Exactly in the right position, exactly at the right time for such a time as this.

You may want to write in your notes right now, for such a time as this. This theme will refrain over and over and over again in the book of Esther. This theme refrains over and over and over again in your life. That God has placed you for such a time as this, right here, right now, whatever season you may be in, in our history, in our time, in this place, in this country, in this state, in this city, in this church, for such a time as this.

You have a purpose for where you're at, with you're at, for someone around you that you may not yet know. And the people around you are here where they're at for you. And you may not yet know it. Such a time as this.

Esther, orphaned, twice displaced from her parents, no father, no mother, and now no homeland of her own. And she didn't choose the exile of Susa any more than she chose losing her parents. And sometimes we get into situations in our lives where we go, I would not have chosen this.

You're right. And that's a fair and a true and a fine feeling. My cousin did not choose the life that he had prior to be taken from his parents and taken from his home and placed into the home of my aunt and uncle. But it was for such a time as then for him.

And you and I, apart from Christ, we too, every single one of us starts in the same way, fatherless, without a home, walking through the wilderness. Esther's orphanage isn't just a backstory, it's our human condition for each and every one of us.

Matter of fact, everyone everywhere say, I was an orphan. Without Jesus, we are orphans. We are walking without direction. The scriptures say that we are spiritually dead or spiritually blind. We might think we know what we're doing, but we don't.

Paul writes about this in Ephesians 2.12, separate from Christ, foreigners to a covenant of the promise, you're without hope and without God in this world.

So in Pokemon, as you're dropped in to your hometown, there's a professor who comes. And he gives you your Pokemon, and he gives you what you need to get going. Because he sees in you where you can go, and he sees in you how you can get farther, faster.

My aunt and uncle saw in my cousin something greater than the life he was living. They saw in him a child to be loved and hugged and told for the very first time, I love you. To not be beaten or shamed because he did things wrong. To not be abused verbally and all the other ways as well. They saw in him a human to be loved and cared for and to be part of a family before he even knew he was ready. Before he even knew that's what he wanted.

I believe one of the most powerful four words you can ever say to someone is, I see in you. I see in you great things. I see in you leadership. I see in you love. I see in you grace. I see in you compassion. I see in you healing. I see in you care. I see in you success. I see in you life.

Say those words to someone someday and watch their hearts and their lives fill to the brim in their bucket as you say to them, I see in you amazing things.

It's what God said to Jeremiah in 1 5, before I formed you in the womb, I knew you before you were born. I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations and Jeremiah responded with like, what do you mean? How so? And God said, I will be with you.

Esther in Esther 2, 5, 15, and 16, when the turn came for Esther, the young woman of Mordecai, who had adopted her, the daughter of his uncle Abil, to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Haggai, the king's unit who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won favor of everyone who saw her.

She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the 10th month, the month of In the seventh year of his reign.

I see in you, God said, someone who will come and deliver my people. And before she even knew what was happening before she even had any competence of what she would be able to do, God saw in her something greater for his people.

You see, it's not about how qualified you are to do the work that God has called you to do. It's about that God has already called you and will qualify you for what he's called you to do. Because God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the called.

And he has called you for such a time as this, to speak his love, share his life, and be his witnesses to the world he's emplaced and entrusted around you.

You see, Mordecai didn't wait for Esther to earn a place in his home. My aunt and uncle didn't wait for the perfect child, didn't say, well, this one doesn't have any blemishes, this one has no scars, this one's not going to have any issues, no. The moment that Esther was ready and needed his love and his care and a home and a family, he took her in.

It is the way of God to say that all people belong. God doesn't sit there and say, you know what, only come to church, only come to the kingdom when you're ready. Only come when you're all put together and you know what to do and you don't have things that are still problems out there.

If that were the case, all of us should get out. Instead, God says, come, because this is not a country club. This is a hospital for the sinners that need a doctor, that need a savior.

So he welcomes us saying all belong. And he qualifies the call. He didn't wait for us to become adoptable. He didn't, he didn't do that. He said, I will predestine you for adoption of sunset before anything you've done deserves it. And by the way, there's nothing you can do that will, that will disqualify you from it.

As long as you hold to Jesus, he will never let you go. Romans 8.15, you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but received the spirit of sonship by whom we cry, everyone everywhere is through the spirit that we say that.

And then you're given your training card in the game Pokemon. And that card has already been ready before you were even there. You were chosen to receive that very card, ready to go.

And before my cousin was chosen and seen, he was already chosen by my aunt and uncle.

You see, my aunt had two kids that were older. Matter of fact, one of my cousins, I didn't even really know because, because he was off and in college and everything when we would hang out, but, but the other cousin I knew, but he was like late in high school and I was in early elementary school.

And he was kind of a surly teenager that my parents were like, Hey, don't hang around him too much, Greg. And so like, you know, uh, but, but, but my aunt and uncle had said they wanted a child that they would raise also together from day one. And they had chosen, though they didn't know his name, they had chosen my cousin before he was even seen.

And so they welcomed him with open arms, just as he was.

Esther four, six, 15 and 16.

Esther sent their supper pie to Mordecai, go gather together all the Jews who are in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days.

Everyone say three days.

And then what are three days kind of remind us of if we're going to wear our Christian hats? Jesus.

Yeah. It's okay to say Sunday school answered Jesus. I won't put you on the spot on that one. Just Jesus.

Right? So, so we already see Jesus.

Yeah. God's not mentioned in the book of Esther, but he is Jesus for three days, night and day. And my attendance will fast as you do. And when this is done, I will go to the King, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.

If you don't see the prefigurement, a pre, pre incarnation of Jesus working in the life of Esther right here, like it, this is, this is where I say, when people say like Jesus is in the new old Testament, I go, you have to actually work a lot harder to believe that than I do to believe that Jesus is everywhere. Like I mean, it's just so clear right here.

This is about Jesus. We're seeing a glimpse of what Jesus will do for all of humanity, not for just the people, the Jews that were in exile, but for you and for me, it's about Jesus.

Paul even writes about this in Ephesians one, four and five, for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight and love.

He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance to his pleasure and his will.

So think about this as Jesus is on the cross, taking away the sins of the world and shouting to God, Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As he does that, he has chosen you by name before you were seen, before you were created, once you were known to be the one who will be rescued, redeemed and delivered from sin, death and the devil.

He chose you before you were seen.

Matter of fact, everyone right now say, I was chosen before I was seen.

If you write that down to remember that, you will go today to one of your campus directors at any campus you're at, and you say to them, I was chosen before I was seen, and they will give you your own Pokemon card.

Now you might think these, so what, we can get a Pokemon card.

Like you can't just get, like you can't just go in a store, like these are hard to get.

Like at stores right now, like they have, they have like whole rules of how you can get Pokemon cards and how you can do all that.

So, so these are, these are really sought after.

So you can do anything you want with your Pokemon card.

Okay.

I mean, selling it on eBay from church might be a little bit fishy, but whatever, but what I'd invite you to do is maybe use it to invite a grandson or a granddaughter or a child or a neighbor or a friend or a coworker and say,

Hey, why don't you come to my church? We got this cool game on series last week was about Pokemon. And I learned that I was chosen before I was seen by my God. And I just want to know that I, I know he chose you too, or maybe you keep it.

And it's just your reminder in one of your days when you're just not sure that God sees you to remember, not only did he, does he see you, but he has chosen you.

He's chosen you for greater things.

Esther who was once adopted and was told to hide where she came from.

She was, had not, and she did that. She didn't reveal her nationality to King Xerxes or her family background, just like Mordecai had told her.

But God does call you to reveal him in wonderful ways.

And she revealed God through her book without mentioning him and in her life.

And so today I do want to challenge you as those who now know that we've been chosen before we're seen, like, are there places where you're hiding your faith? Are there spots where you're, you're still not just living out who God's called you to be?

Are there places where you say, you know what I'm at? I'm at a dinner where they don't pray. They don't talk to God. They're, they're really not God people. So I just won't pray.

Are there places where maybe, maybe you're, you're sitting there and you just don't, you don't tell them that you're a Christian? God's called you to let that light shine because in Galatians four, you are no longer a slave, but God's child.

And since you're a child, he has made you an heir.

And as an heir, you have a place to go.

And whatever your beginning is, isn't where you'll always be.

It's just your starting point, not your final point.

Three or four years ago, I buried my aunt and afterwards I was sitting with my uncle and Craig was out grabbing some things to bring it, bring to the house.

And he said to me, you know what, Gregory, he said, I, I never would have gotten through this over the past 10 or 15 years without Craig.

He said, especially during COVID, he's a doctor.

And so he had to go and he was called in out of retirement to serve his community.

And he said, Ruth never had a day that Craig wasn't by her side 24 seven.

He stopped everything in his life and gave the last 15 years of his life to her.

And later, as I was talking to my cousin, I brought that up and he said, how can I not?

They gave me everything and took me from a place that I didn't even know was wrong into a life where I learned that I was loved.

How could I not give up everything for my mom?

Wherever we're at in our small beginnings, it's never going to be the end of our story.

It's got greater things for us to go.

And we get to walk through those.

Esther did this when the King's order and edict had been proclaimed.

Many young women were brought to the Citadel of Susa and put under the care of Haggai and Esther was taken to the King's palace, entrusted to Haggai who have charge over them.

It's a small beginning and she's going to do great things.

And we have the same confidence that Paul writes to the Philippians when he says, we are confident of this and him who has begun a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus.

So Esther, Esther, she had this small identity in God and it was that very thing that God used to save his people, to deliver them, to bring them to purging, which means deliverance.

To willingly say as an orphan, if I perish, I perish. She speaks on behalf of God's people.

And your adoption into the kingdom of God wasn't just a rescue from Satan.

It was actually a beginning of your life as an heir in the family of God.

The Romans heard about this as co-heirs with Christ.

If we indeed share in his sufferings, an order that we will share in his glory.

And so today we're reminded that Pikachu says, Pokemon Go.

Jesus says, disciples go and transform lives in the power and in the name of Jesus as co-laborers and co-heirs with Christ.

So everyone everywhere, stand up with me to pray.

Gracious God, we thank you and praise you that you have adopted us into your kingdom, that you have given us paradise, that we are inheritors of the new heaven and the new earth and that you see in us before we were born greater things than we see in ourselves and that you chose us before you saw us to give us everlasting and eternal life.

And so let us go confident in this calling, not because we deserve it and not fearful that we'll lose it, but qualified because you have chosen and called us today, tomorrow and forever.

And so all of God's people who have been called to go said, Amen.