

2020 Campout  
 Winston Churchill/Esther  
 ABC 7/26/20

Over the past several years at the church campout I've tied in something related to where we held the campout or something historical I've read recently. I could ask to see if anyone remembers any of them, but I won't do that to you. Last year we looked at Marie Dorian.

2018 – Operation Mincemeat from WW2

2017 – Touching the Void, Andes climbers

2016 – Pilgrims & Lost Airman (WW2)

2015 – ???

2014 – Revolutionary War

2013 – Building the Transcontinental Railroad

2012 – Making of Howard Prairie Lake & the importance of water

Whatever year we met at Jedidiah Smith Park, obviously, I tied in Jed Smith.

WW2 has always fascinated me & I've read many books about different aspects of the war & have enjoyed talking with those who served in it. But biographies of the major people during the war have always been a bit daunting. For example: *The Definitive FDR* by James MacGregor Burns is 2 volumes with over 2,200 pages. Biographies on Eisenhower are often over 1,000 pages. & Churchill has so much written about him, it's overwhelming. But when I saw a book written by Erik Larson (who I've read in the past (*The Devil in the White City* & *Dead Wake*) & enjoyed & recommend) about Winston Churchill published this spring titled, *The Splendid & the Vile*, I bought it. After all, it was only 546 pages. Come to find out, it only covers one year of Churchill's life, his 1<sup>st</sup> year as Prime Minister between May, 1940 & May, 1941. But I've found it fascinating. The title of the book comes from the diaries of Churchill's private secretary, John Colville. Writing about the peculiar beauty of watching bombs fall over London he wrote, *Never was there such a contrast of natural splendor & human vileness. Thus, The Splendid & the Vile.*

We all would probably recognize pictures of Churchill & recognize some of his speeches. Churchill's reputation as a great orator (even though as a young man he struggled with a stutter & a lisp) is

based principally on his speeches & broadcasts as Prime Minister during the summer of 1940 during a vital point in the WWII when Britain was under the threat of invasion. In that summer, Britain stood alone against Germany in the war & Germany seemed unstoppable. One by one, the great powers of Europe had fallen to the German military. It appeared that Britain would be invaded as soon as Hitler could demolish Britain's small air force. The US, in an effort to stay out of the war, had maintained a policy of neutrality. Britain was the only thing stopping Hitler's advance. Larson writes, *Churchill's great trick—one he had demonstrated before, & would demonstrate again—was his ability to deliver dire news & yet leave his audience feeling encouraged & uplifted.* Churchill put it this way, *I never gave them courage, I was able to focus theirs.*

Churchill only made 5 broadcasts to the nation during this vital stage of the War, but these speeches conveyed Churchill's determination & commitment, & they gave his country confidence.

A few quotes from his speeches:

*This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.*

*Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, & so bear ourselves, that if the British Empire & its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'*

*When I look back on the perils which have been overcome, upon the great mountain waves in which the gallant ship has driven, when I remember all that has gone wrong, & remember also all that has gone right, I feel sure we have no need to fear the tempest. Let it roar, & let it rage. We shall come through.*

*We seek no treasure, we seek no territorial gains, we seek only the right of man to be free; we seek his rights to worship his god, to lead his life in his own way, secure from persecution. As the humble labourer returned from his work when the day is done, & sees the smoke curling upwards from his cottage home in the serene evening sky, we wish him to know that no rat-a-tat (here he knocked loudly on the table) of the secret police upon his door will disturb his leisure or interrupt his rest.*

*We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas & oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence & growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields & in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender (6/4/40, following the evacuation of British & French armies from Dunkirk).*

He never wavered in telling the people the hard truth, but always followed it with optimism & an unwavering conviction that England would prevail. He once said, *It would be foolish to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart & courage.*

He had many notable quotes about many things. On marriage & family: *One of the secrets of a happy marriage is never to speak or to see the loved one before noon.* He also had a formula for family size, 4 being the ideal number of children. Why? *One to reproduce your wife, one to reproduce yourself, one for the increase of population, & one in case of accident.*

He was in many ways, a difficult man, demanding, & moody. He wrote to his own son, *Your idle & lazy life is very offensive to me. You appear to be leading a perfectly useless existence.* But he was also tenderhearted, forgiving, & easily moved to tears. When Churchill toured a bomb site, he was described as: *Tough, yes, but at times weeping openly, overcome by the devastation & the resilience of the crowd. In one hand he held a large white handkerchief, with which he mopped his eyes; & his other he grasped the handle of his walking stick.* It was said that he had the ability to transform *the despondent misery of disaster into a grimly certain steppingstone to ultimate victory.*

When the armistice between France & Germany was put into force on June 25, 1940, the fate of the French Navy, 4<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, was of critical importance to the British. Churchill & his government dreaded the prospect of the French Fleet falling into enemy hands. The odds were already heavy against the Royal Navy. Facing both the German & Italian navies, it was stretched thin in the North Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Far East, & the Mediterranean Sea. Because the French government changed sides & joined the Axis powers, the French & the British were at war with each other although the British didn't declare it. Churchill & his ministers decided the French Fleet must be put permanently out of Hitler's reach. On the evening of July 2, Admiral Somerville received a message from Churchill telling him, *You are charged with one of the most disagreeable & difficult tasks that a British admiral has ever been faced with, but we have complete confidence in you & rely on you to carry it out relentlessly.* Churchill ordered him to fire on France's navy, killing over 1,200 French sailors. Churchill's daughter wrote in her diary, *It is so terrible that we should be forced to fire on our own...allies. Papa is shocked & deeply grieved that such action was necessary.*

Obviously, from our perspective, he was the right man for the job of Prime Minister of England during WW2. Not everyone agreed with that. There was opposition to King George VI appointing Churchill (65 yrs old) to replace Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister on May 10, 1940. That was the very day Hitler invaded Holland, Belgium, & France. How would you like that to be your 1<sup>st</sup> day on the job? Many felt that Churchill was *flamboyant, electric, wholly unpredictable* & a questionable choice to be Prime Minister. A socialist member of parliament said after Churchill's appointment, *While I have a tremendous admiration for the oratorical powers of the Prime Minister, who can almost make you believe that black is white, I have no faith in his achieving anything of lasting benefit to humanity.* & yet Churchill had the right combination of skills & personality traits to stay the course, juggle strategies, & maintain high morale among the citizens. He was a master of words & held speeches that turned devastating facts, into a high-spirited & optimistic Britain, willing to fight back even harder.

Hitler, Goring, & Goebbels were repeatedly confounded by his unwillingness to surrender or sue for peace. They consistently underestimated his resolve, resourcefulness, & leadership ability. Joseph Goebbels poured out his frustrations in his diary. *When will that creature Churchill finally surrender?* he complained. *England cannot hold out forever!*

Churchill was quirky & eccentric in many ways. He had his flaws & idiosyncrasies. A few examples: He took 2 baths every day & the water had to be 98 degrees.

He often wore pink silk underwear.

He designed his own *siren suit* (to be thrown on quickly when the air raid sirens sounded). One secretary described him like this: *He used to wear a siren suit & we used to see this shortish, fattish, tubby man bouncy along in a siren suit.* It's also been described as an oversized onesie.

His favorite place to work was in bed or in the bath tub, where he regularly received guests.

He had no body shame & shocked & embarrassed people frequently with his full or partial nudity.

The White House's Chief Usher, JB West recalled that during Churchill's 24-day visit,

*We got used to his 'jumpsuit,' the extraordinary one-piece uniform he wore every day, but the servants never quite got over seeing him naked in his room when they'd go up to serve brandy. It was the jumpsuit or nothing. In his room, Mr. Churchill wore no clothes at all most of the time during the day.*

Roosevelt also got a close-up look at Churchill. His 1<sup>st</sup> night in the White House, Inspector Thompson, also one of the guests, was with Churchill in his room, when someone knocked at the door. Thompson answered & found the president outside in his wheelchair, alone in the hall. Thompson opened the door wide, then saw an odd expression come over the president's face as he looked into the room. *I turned*, Thompson wrote. *Winston Churchill was stark naked, a drink in one hand, a cigar in the other.* The president prepared to wheel himself out. *Come on in, Franklin*, Churchill said. *We're quite alone.* The president offered what Thompson called an *odd shrug*, then wheeled himself in. *You see, Mr. President*, Churchill said, *I have nothing to hide.*

He smoked big cigars, liked to drink, & was always broke.

On his 1<sup>st</sup> radio speech to the country, everyone thought that he was drunk or having a heart attack, simply because he refused to take the cigar out of his mouth.

Churchill's determination, unrelenting optimism, & eloquent speeches encouraged the people & gave them hope. He inspired them to realize the part they played in that moment of history. Amid the sheer terror of the relentless bombings, (57 straight nights in London) Churchill was an extraordinary leader & beacon of hope. Churchill's private secretary, Elizabeth Layton, said,

*We of his personal staff were completely devoted to him, even though he was inclined to be impatient & demanding. He was somebody who drew our loyalty & our deep respect & affection ... The negative side was only on the surface. Underneath he was a very caring person.*

Winston's character, spirit, & determination led a beleaguered country to its ultimate goal, that of staying a free Britain. He was a masterful leader of people, who made those around him strive for things it seemed impossible to achieve. The people adored him (although he wasn't re-elected in 1945), as he made himself one of them, standing tall in the face of an imminent defeat. He was the man England needed & he pushed through valiantly, providing his nation with the spirit & determination it so needed in its hour of darkness. He said, *Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long & hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival.* As Churchill wrote in his memoirs, *I felt as if I were walking with destiny, & that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour, & for this trial.* He also stated:

*To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are figuratively tapped on the shoulder & offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them & fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour.*

The right man, for the right job, at the right time. Chance? Luck? I don't think so because our God is the God of working behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes. The OT book of Esther is the perfect example. It could appear, at 1<sup>st</sup> glance, to be a fictional work. It bears all the marks of a

great short story: a dramatic plot, a villain, a hero, a damsel in distress, & a surprising climax, followed by most living happily ever after. But it's inspired Scripture. It is, in fact, a vital link in the chain of Jewish history, as it reveals a crucial event of the Jews who remained in Persia. The story of Esther is remarkable. It belongs to that period when God's people were captives & scattered across the Persian Empire. It has a fairy tale atmosphere tinged with the deadly smell of Hitler's gas chambers. The events of Esther are retold every year during the Feast of Purim which commemorates Haman's attempt at the extermination of the Jewish people & how God rescued them. I'm not going to retell it or read it for you this morning. I encourage you to read it on your own.

In exile, Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai. She was a beautiful young Jewish woman, who hid the fact she was a Jew. When Queen Vashti fell from favor for refusing to dance before the King & his court, Esther found favor with the King & soon becomes his new queen. But when her people are on the verge of destruction from Haman, a leader in the King's court, she's put in a difficult spot. Does she speak up & risk her life on the chance she can change the king's mind & save her people from extinction? Who can't be touched with the sense of both history & destiny at Mordecai's question to Esther, **who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?** (4:14).

This story is a great illustration of the sovereignty & providence of God. God's fingerprints are certainly all over this story. God chose to be subtle, but He was there. He doesn't act miraculously in this book but providentially. What do I mean by that? God acts in no blatant way, but is hidden in, with, under, & above the fumbles & foibles of mankind. He works through the normal actions of people in the usual order of life. God works through a lot of *happenings* & just the right *circumstances*. This story of Esther is filled with crucial happenings that might simply look like chance. After all, the book explains the Feast of Purim, which comes from the Hebrew word for *lots* or *dice*. If you think all this happened by chance, then this book will be nothing more to you than a really remarkable story of how all this stuff just seemed to happen. What stuff?

- Esther happens to be Jewish & beautiful.

- She's lucky enough to find favor with the king.
- Mordecai chances to hear a plot against the king.
- A report of this is recorded in the king's records.
- Haman notices that Mordecai doesn't kneel before him & he learns that Mordecai is a Jew.
- When Haman plots his revenge, the throw of the dice indicates the date for execution is almost a year away! (What does Prov 16:33 say? **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.**)
- Esther is fortunate to get the king's approval to speak, but puts it off until the next day.
- Because of her deferral, Haman is spurned by Mordecai one more time.
- This causes him to tell his friends about it.
- His friends urge him to build a scaffold immediately!
- As luck would have it, the king didn't sleep well that night & by fate had a book brought to him that retold Mordecai's deed.
- He then chanced to ask whether Mordecai had been rewarded & his servants knew the answer.
- Haman approaches the king just when Xerxes is wondering how Mordecai should be honored.
- Later, Xerxes returns to the queen just in time to see Haman pleading with Esther in a way that didn't look good.
- As luck would have it, the gallows Haman built for Mordecai is ready when the King wants to kill Haman.

Do you read the story of Esther as a series of lucky coincidences? I hope not! It was written to show that God Himself acts to achieve the total defeat of His foes & for the safety of His people. Haman meant honor for himself & the scaffold for Mordecai, but God meant the scaffold for Haman & honor for Mordecai. God's will is always accomplished. He doesn't have to be mentioned in this book for us to recognize His work. God can deliver His people in whatever way He wants. He can deliver people with the miracles of the Exodus or He can deliver people with sovereignly assisted circumstances, as we see here. God is the chief actor in the book of Esther. He is the Deliverer of His people.

What do we learn from this book?

**A) God Punishes His Enemies** According to Jn 17:4, the world hates God's people because the world hates the God we represent. What will happen to those who persevere in hating & opposing God? They'll be judged & punished by God. What does this mean for you?

1) It means that you should consider your current state carefully. While you have time, stop & think how you stand before God. Do you believe in Him? Have you submitted to Him? Do you love Him? Have you asked His forgiveness for your sins or do you deny or simply ignore Him?

2) God's judgment on His enemies also means you should repent immediately. God has taken on flesh in Jesus & came as our Deliverer to live a perfect life & to die on the cross for the sins of those who repent & believe in Him. He calls on you to repent of your sins & to turn & trust Him. If you do, He'll grant forgiveness for your sins & a new life in Him. What other way do you have for dealing with your sins? You can't deny them. You'll stand before God & give Him an account. What will you say to Him about your sins? What excuse can you give to change His mind? You won't find one! Instead, repent & believe in Jesus Christ today. Receive the forgiveness for sins & the new life He offers! Because God always punishes His enemies.

**B) God Delivers His People** That's what the book of Esther teaches us. Maybe that makes you wonder, *What about the Chinese believers who are imprisoned & tortured for their faith? What of the Christians killed in Nigeria, Iran, & Indonesia? What about the 6 million Jews killed in WW2? What do you mean, "God delivers His people"?* In this sinful world, the Bible doesn't promise us escape from physical death or even martyrdom, but Esther tells us this: God will preserve His people for His own purposes & for His own glory. Think how safe the church of God is. No, not from earthly violence & physical death, but from final ruin before God! When we repent & come to Him through Jesus alone, we're no longer His enemy destined for punishment. Instead we become His children. As we know, Jesus is the ultimate Deliverer of God's people. Insofar as God used Esther to deliver His people, she pointed to Jesus. The book of Esther reminds us of the certain truth that, as Jesus said, He will build His church (Mt 16:18). Christ's church won't be destroyed & as Christians we can rejoice in this.



What does this mean for you? It means that you can be **comforted** in your trials, because God won't abandon His people. There are no accidents or coincidences in life. God guides & directs all things, including the circumstances of your life. We should carefully examine the situations God puts us in & look for opportunities for evangelism & service to Him. We can trust that He allows trials to come to His people for our own good. Charles Spurgeon said,

*It seems a very small matter whether you or I shall sleep tonight or toss restlessly on our beds, but God will be in our rest or in our wakefulness; we know not what His purpose may be, but His hand will be in it, neither doth any man sleep or wake but according to the decree of the Lord.*

When you feel as if events are out of control, read the book of Esther, remember God's overruling care, & be comforted. The author of Hebrews encourages us to **hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful** (Heb 10:23). He will finish writing the story He's begun upon the pages of history, even upon the pages of your life. God's people still wait, but we wait in confidence of the God who delivers! God's deliverance of His people also means that you can be **courageous** in obedience. Mordecai knew that help would arise from somewhere (4:14). He knew His God. Yet this didn't make Mordecai inactive or cause him to counsel Esther toward complacency. Instead, it motivated both of them to action. Since God will deliver His people, we can be joyfully **confident** in all things. Again, Spurgeon said, *Every child of God is where God has placed him for some purpose*. Knowing that God brought you to where you are this very moment, don't you have a reason for confident joy? Knowing that God delivers His people, we can be comforted, courageous, & confident!

How could little orphan Esther end up as queen, Mordecai as prime minister, & the exiled Jewish people in safety? Through all of these unlikely circumstances, God was fulfilling His promise to His people. As with the slavery of Joseph & the cross of Jesus, what man intended for ill, God used for good. Now is the time for us to rise up to God's calling in our lives to faithfully live for Him, to reach out to serve others, to resolutely stand for His Word, to fervently seek revival, & to urgently pray for our nation. This is our special moment & it can be our *finest hour*. We may not be called to save our race from extinction or save our country from annihilation by Nazis. But we're called to serve our God & to serve one another. Our exploits don't have to be earthshaking events. Think of

the Good Samaritan, he showed compassion to someone in need, not in a spectacular public way, but in a quiet, almost private way. God has prepared you for just this time. He's placed you purposefully so He might accomplish His plan through you. To paraphrase Churchill, *Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, & so bear ourselves, that if the Lord tarries for a 1,000 years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'*

So when you are faced with a time such as this, remember Esther, remember that God is hiding, God is working in our lives even when we cannot see it. Remember that **faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen** (Heb 11:1).

Esther, like each of us, was created for just such a special moment. She was directed to faithfully stand up for her people in a way that was uniquely related to her position & fitted to her talents. She lived up to her *finest hour* by doing so, & what a tragedy it would have been if she was not prepared for that moment. What about us? God has prepared us for this hour. Let us make it our *finest hour*.