

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: The Lord Is My Banner

Pastor Scott Dudley

Disclaimer: *This transcript was computer generated and may contain errors.*

Scripture: Exodus 17:8-16

⁸ The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

¹⁰ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹ As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹² When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³ So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven."

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. ¹⁶ He said, "Because hands were lifted up against[a] the throne of the LORD, he LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

Transcript:

Hello, my name is Scott Dudley. I'm the lead pastor here. And I just want to say thank you for joining us. We are so glad to have you in worship with us this morning. The scripture today comes from Exodus chapter 16. It says this, "The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim, Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men

and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow, I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.' So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the Hill. As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites were winning. But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady until sunset.

So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar and called it the Lord is my banner." So Jesus help us to understand this scripture and how it applies to our lives and the good news about you that's in it. We pray this in your name Jesus, amen. Well, when I was at Stanford, I would participate in the baccalaureates ceremony every year as part of graduation weekend and it's a formal academic ceremony. So everyone would wear the robes, their academic robes from the school from where they got their PhD. And most of those robes would be black or gray and maybe some colors on the sleeves to indicate the school they came from.

However, I got my PhD from Stanford and this is Stanford's robe. Oh yeah, it is bright. So there I would be surrounded by people in gray and black suits and I'm wearing this, you could so pick me out of a crowd. In fact, you can see this from outer space. It's bright, it's tacky, it's silly. It just screams I'm insecure and I need to show off and it hangs in my closet and I can pull it out whenever I want. This is a walking banner that says the school I went to, and no, I'm not going to wear it for the whole sermon because it would be distracting and blind you. It's a walking banner that says where I went to school. We're doing a sermon series on the names of God, because the names of God in the Bible reveal something about his character and for every problem or opportunity that we face in life, there is a name of God that speaks to that problem or opportunity.

And in today's story about a battle that the Israelites faced, we encounter the name Yahweh Nissi, which means the Lord is my banner. And that name gives us courage and energy in the battles of our lives or even if you're not in a battle right now, just the steady headwinds of going to school or trying to balance work and home, or maybe even just great opportunities you have, exciting things but they take a lot of energy and perseverance. The Lord is my banner. Significant name. Now back in the Bible days, banners were held up during battles to let folks know which army was marching in front of them. Banners show who were committed to and under whose power and authority, we stand. Banners show who are committed to an under whose power and authority we stand and we are all under some banner, the only question is what's the banner?

Maybe it's your job. When I tell people I'm a pastor, that's a banner that makes people assume a whole lot of stuff about me. How we position ourselves on Tik Tok or Instagram or Twitter or Facebook. That's a banner that says, "Look, this is who I am." Maybe it's your ethnicity. We got a Christmas letter this year from some friends of ours and he talks a lot about how he's a stereotypical Swedish person, doesn't show emotion, an introvert. And so, their Christmas letter said that Eric is looking forward to the end of COVID and the six foot social distancing rule so that he can go back to his regular 12 feet. He's marching under the Swedish banner. And many of our banners are good things, really good things. But if we give them more time and energy than God, they ultimately fail us.

So what's your banner? And is it bringing you deep and lasting fulfillment? And is it enough to help you face the challenges and opportunities that you have in your life? Now, the background of the story that I just read is that the Israelites were slaves in Egypt until Moses comes along to get them out, Pharaoh wouldn't let them go, but God sent 10 plagues, so he let them leave. But then he changed his mind, pursued them, trapped them at the red sea but Moses stretches his staff out over the red sea and God divides it in two and the Israelites escape. And then in the story that immediately precedes the one that I just read, they run out of water and they start to grumble and complain. And so, God tells Moses to strike a rock with a stick and he does, and water comes out. So problem solved.

But then the very next verse says the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites. So they just solved the water crisis and now they've got a new problem and doesn't it seem to go like that in life, right? You solve one problem and then you get another. COVID, pandemic, lockdown, but yay, there's a vaccine, but whoa, there's a lot of us and this is going to take some time. Yay, I got into the college I wanted to, and then whoa, this college has a lot of hard work, right? Ups and downs. And throughout scripture the Amalekites are always attacking the Israelites and their goal is to exterminate them. In fact, centuries later in the book of Esther, Amalekite descendant named Haman launches a genocide against the Jews. And this is why God opposes the Amalekites, they're very bad people. But on a more symbolic level, they represent things that oppose God's purposes in our lives and in our world.

And we've all got Amalekites in our lives. Maybe it's an ongoing conflict in your family or workplace, or as a friend or neighbor. Maybe it's a health or financial or school or career problem, or maybe it's a good thing, it's a wonderful opportunity, but it requires a lot of energy and time and perseverance. Maybe it's just trying to balance work and home, poverty, racism, violence, all of these things are Amalekites that come against God's purposes in our lives And in our world, who or what are your Amalekites. So then the text says, "Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men to go out and fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow, I will stand up on the hill with a staff of God in my hands.'" And

this sounds funny, right? Joshua, you fight the battle and I'll be up on the hill. I'll be there cheering you on, feel free to succeed, buddy.

It sounds like Moses is trying to get out of the hard work, but that's not what's going on here. They actually form a great team, but they have different roles. So Joshua fought the Amalekites and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hand, the Amalekites were winning. So here's an important spiritual truth. When facing the Amalekites in our lives as Dr. Tony Evans says, "Before you give up, look up." Moses holding the staff in the air, raising his hands isn't some magic formula that makes the Israelites win. It's how people in the Bible pray back then, they raised their hands. In fact, people still do that sometimes in worship, they raise their hands, right? Even occasionally a Presbyterian will at least do one of these T-Rex praise and worship things, right?

Moses raised hands shows an attitude of depending on God, not ourselves for the victory, depending on God for the victory. Because the staff Moses raises isn't just any old staff, that's the staff he used to part the red sea. That's the staff that drew water from a rock, the staff represents God's power to deliver. So when he holds it up, the soldiers who are fighting in the Valley below are reminded that it is under God's authority and with God's power that they are fighting the battle. The staff is the banner they fight under. Now to depend on God does not mean that we're not involved in defeating the Amalekites in our lives, right? I mean, Moses is on the mountain praying, reminding the Israelites of God's power in total dependence on God, while Joshua is down in the Valley fighting the battle and it takes both. There's always a balance between what God does on the mountain and what God does in the Valley below.

And the mountain is spiritual power, and the Valley is our own efforts. Some people, they're all spiritual power people. God's going to rescue me, God's going to deliver me, well yeah, but we've got to be involved. One of the memes I saw when the COVID lockdowns began said, "For the first time in history, we can save the human race by laying in front of the TV and doing nothing. Let's not screw this up." I liked that. That's not what it means to depend on God. We don't wait around for God to just drop the job in our lap without even applying for one or fix the marriage without our involvement of any kind, we are involved. But then of course, there are other people and dare I say, I think maybe the majority of us in this church who are focused on our own efforts. If it's going to be it's up to me. We can do it, God can help.

The point of the story is you need both. Without Moses depending on spiritual power, Joshua would have lost, but without Joshua fighting the battle, they also would have lost. You need both. But I think a lot of us, myself included have a harder time relying on God's power and we turn to our own efforts more. I've shared with you before that one of the most profound things that Pastor Alexis ever said to me, he's from Rwanda,

he said, "I've noticed that here in America you spend five minutes praying before a meeting and then two hours solving a problem but in Rwanda, we spend two hours praying and five minutes solving the problem." That reflects that my own efforts attitude. I've seen so many folks who are struggling in their marriage try to fix it by their own efforts, which usually involves trying to convince the other person how wrong they are.

But scripture says, "Confess your sins and ask forgiveness, pray together." When couples start praying together about their marriage, it softens hearts and often it leads to huge breakthroughs and heals marriages, because you're bringing spiritual power into the mix. And there is always a spiritual component to every battle we face. Always a spiritual component. Scripture says our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. The problem is not your spouse or the family member or the coworker that you can't get along with. The problem is a spiritual one of pride and selfishness and hardheartedness probably in both of you. Those are spiritual problems requiring spiritual solutions.

To march under Jesus' banner means we march under his power and his authority. So the question is, what banners are we marching under that aren't Jesus? One of the things that troubles me is how many Christians on both sides of the political divide seem to really believe at their core that ultimately what is going to save us is electing the right person. They're marching under the Republican banner or the Democrat banner or whatever it is and elections are important. And as citizens, we should engage them responsibly, but a country as angry, fearful, suspicious, and divided as we are is facing at its core a Spiritual crisis, which no politician can fix because those are spiritual problems and you need spiritual power to fix them. And our allegiance to Jesus has to come before everything else, including our politics, even our allegiance to the country.

I mean, I love this country. I love this country deeply, but I love Jesus more because that's the right order. And throughout the 2,000 years of church history, whenever cross and flag become identified as the same thing, that has led to terrible things like crusades and inquisitions. That's called Christian nationalism and you don't find it in the Bible. The well-known evangelist, Billy Graham once said, "I came close to identifying the American way of life with the kingdom of God. Then I realized that God had called me to a higher kingdom in America. I have tried to be faithful to my calling as a minister of the gospel." Billy Graham. See, we become part of the problem not the solution when we march under any other banner than the cross, because there is no true victory without spiritual power.

So before we give up, look up. And to do that well, and to do that consistently, we need some help. In fact, we need each other. I was tempted to ask you to hold up

your hands at the beginning of this sermon and then never tell you to put them down just for fun. Because if you do that for very long, it does not take long for your arms to get really tired, and that's happening in this story. The text says when Moses hands grew tired, Aaron and Hur held his hands up one on one side, one on the other so that his hands remained steady until sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with a sword. When the battle goes on and on and on, and you get discouraged and you reach sometimes a point where you can't even pray, that's when you need an Aaron and a Hur to hold up your hands.

Pray for you when you can't pray for yourself, remind you of the goodness of God. That's why I'm so glad that so many of you are in all in groups because people are finding community and support and growing in their faith in those groups because we need each other. And it's reciprocal, it goes both ways. Aaron and Hur are holding up Moses' hands, but Moses is in a way holding up Joshua who's fighting the battle. Because Moses is the older generation, blessing and empowering the younger generation. And when they win the battle, God says to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure Joshua hears it." Because the younger generation needs encouragement from older people who are up on the hill, not over the hill, up on the Hill, empowering them and cheering them on.

Every younger person needs an older person who admires them. Your kids, nieces and nephews, grandkids, younger people in your office or neighborhood. If you're in college, a high school student, if you're in high school, a middle schooler, if you're in middle school, an elementary aged student needs to hear words of encouragement from you because it puts so much power into us when people believe in us. And we need to be both, we need to be people who hold up other people's hands, but we also need to be people who let others hold up ours, because a lot of us, myself included love being the helper, but we don't like being the help. I don't want people to think I'm needy. Well, you are needy, so you might as well admit it, right? That's just pride and it's also selfish because we're denying other people the blessing of helping us.

And the way we hold other people's hands up isn't by just giving them good advice, here's what I read in my secular self help book, no, no, no is to look together to God, to look up so we don't give up, pray for each other, encourage each other. Remind each other of God's goodness. A while back, a young adult on our staff named Daniel Bates told a couple of us a story about how back before COVID he and his girlfriend, Miara met two of our longtime members in this church, Bob and Nancy Vanderhorn. And Bob and Nancy are older and it's hard for them to get out as much as they used to. In fact, I talked to them this week and Nancy is very ill and would really appreciate your prayers, but they are still in the battle. So before COVID, when Daniel and Miara met them, Miara's Daniel's girlfriend, Nancy started asking them questions about some big things going on in their lives.

So Daniel was on staff here for a two year residency, and that was ending last year, so he needed to find a job. Miara was worried about her job security as well, and they were wanting to get married, but this job thing was hanging over them. So Nancy asked them to email her all their prayer requests. And in fact, she was so vigilant about it that when Daniel missed a week of emailing her, the prayer request, the next time he saw her, she called him out on it. Daniel said it hurts so good. Well, fast forward to this summer. And God was working in Daniel's heart and in ours and a permanent position opened up here in our youth department and Daniel was the right person for that. So now he has a permanent job with us here in our youth staff. Miara has a job for the foreseeable future and they got married this summer.

Well, in the middle of July, when all of these things needed to be settled, Nancy called Miara just to ask how things are going. And Nancy remembered that they had all these decisions to make by the end of July and so, she asked Miara and she said, "I just had to reach out for you and ask you because I've been praying for you both." And Daniel said, "It felt so good to not only hear someone say I'm praying for you, but then to check back in with you, because well, they've actually been praying for you." Like they actually did it and Daniel said, "I was just overwhelmed with God's love." And I had two thoughts, first, this is exactly how the church family should be and second, wow, even though Bob and Nancy, aren't physically able to do some of the things they used to do. They are still in the battle. They are still following Jesus with everything they've got.

Daniel said, "It was such a small thing that they did to pray for us, but it had a huge impact on me." Bob and Nancy, blessed and encouraged the younger generation, held up their hands in a time of stress and decisions and brought spiritual power into their lives by praying for them and pointing them to God from where their help comes from, because that's how we do it at BelPres, just like that, and in the name of Jesus. At the end of the story, when Joshua's victorious, when it's all over, it says that, "Moses built an altar and called it the Lord is my banner." Jesus is our banner. In fact, the name Joshua means the Lord saves and the Greek form of the name Joshua is Jesus. And just like Moses goes up on a hill in this story, Jesus went up on a hill called Golgotha. And just as Moses raises his hands in dependence on God in this story, Jesus raised his hands and was nailed to a cross.

And just as Moses had two people, one on either side of him, Jesus was crucified between two thieves, only unlike Aaron and Hur who helped Moses. These two thieves did not help Jesus. One mocked and the other believed in him, but neither could help him because Jesus was fighting a battle of his own. Taking on all our guilt, for all the sins we've sinned and the ways we've hurt people and hurt ourselves, taking all of that pain, the price in our place, and then conquering the ultimate Amalekite in our lives, death, and having conquered even that he can conquer anything. This week we

heard a story from the Center For Champions in Rwanda and 14 years ago we provided the money to build that center. And it is still changing kids' lives by introducing them to Jesus and giving them job skills so that they can get out of poverty. And we heard from a boy named Emmanuel, who along with his siblings was orphaned at a very young age.

And they went to live with her grandmother, but then she died and so, they were on their own. And Emmanuel said they lived a life of suffering until finally an aunt took them in and started paying for their school. But then just as they felt like they were getting some hope, the aunt said she couldn't take care of them anymore and they had to leave, so they were on their own again. And Emmanuel said the most crushing thing was that he had to leave school because that was his hope for a better future. But then one day he just happened, just happened to run into someone for the Center For Champions. And this person told Emmanuel about the center. So Emmanuel went there, told his story and he enrolled in the school and Emmanuel said, "This has been a perfect miracle from God." He said, "The center does a great job giving students hope through their regular Bible studies."

And he said, "As I listen to the word of God, my hope for the future returned." And now he's almost done with school. His sister got married and she has three kids. Unfortunately, her husband died and she has a job, but it's tough to make ends meet. But now Emmanuel is saying with all this hope in his voice saying, "I have a dream to continue my education at the university and master my skills so I can get a good job and with a good job, I'm going to be able to help support my sister and her children." And he ended his story saying this. "When I look at my past life and see the great things God has done for me, I look to the future with eyes of great hope. I want to thank everyone who supports the center financially, because without your support, my hope for a bright future would have been lost and I would not be having a smile on my face, which I now have." His banner is Jesus.

Now he's involved. He has to study. He has to work, but Jesus is bringing spiritual power into his life. It's Jesus that guided him to that person that he just happened to run into, who told them about the Center For Champions. Jesus is renewing his hope and giving him energy. Jesus is giving him a whole new future. And if you give to this church, you help support that center, you are Aaron and Hur holding up Emmanuel and other students' hands and pointing them to Jesus where their help comes from. When Jesus is our banner all things are possible. So before you give up, look up. Don't throw in the towel until you've raised the staff. And every day, this week begin all your prayers with this name, say, "Jesus you are my banner and you are higher than all other banners in my life." And then pray.

Because when Jesus is our banner, no weapon formed against us can remain. And even if God does not change your circumstances, but often he does, but even if he

doesn't, he will change you and give you joy where you only felt sorrow, hope where you felt hopeless, power where you felt powerless and courage where you felt only fear. There's another place in the Bible in the song of Solomon's that has a verse about banners and it says this, "He brought me to his banqueting table and his banner over me is love." Jesus' banner over you is love, which means the Amalekites in your life, they don't stand a chance. Jesus thank you that you cover us. You are our banner and Lord, in everything we do this week, help us to do it under your banner and in your name and with your power so the world knows that you live because they see you alive in us. We pray this in your name Jesus, amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Exodus 17:8-16

Opening Questions:

- Icebreaker: What is the weirdest job you've ever had?
- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions -- Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- The Amalekites were repeated adversaries of the Israelites throughout scripture. Their intent was to wipe the Israelites out completely which is why God says he opposes them. They represent those things that come against God's purposes for our lives and for our world. What are the "Amalekites" you are facing right now and how is God showing up in that battle?
- In scripture armies used banners to indicate whose army they were and what authority they marched under. From the evidence of your life and how you live, what would other people say are the banners you are under?
- What would be the characteristics you would see in a person who lived completely under Jesus' banner?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week?

- Who might you share this with?