

We have been thinking about names of God that we find in the Bible. Two weeks ago it was Jehovahh Rohi which means the Lord's my Shepherd. Last week it was Jehovahh Tsidkenu, which means the Lord my righteousness. Today the name we are looking at is Jehovah Nissi. Our reading today is about a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. After the battle Moses built an altar and we're told he called it 'Jehovahh Nissi' – the Lord, My Banner.

It's fairly easy to understand why you might need a shepherd to guide, protect and help you. It's also fairly easy to get that we need God to give us his goodness, or righteousness, in order that we might be good. But why on earth would we need God to be some sort of flag?

Sometimes we feel like giving up. I suspect most of us have been there at some point. Things get hard, nothing is going the way we want it to, and we feel like giving up. Maybe it's something like losing weight; maybe being a better parent; maybe you're struggling to stay in your job; or to be more faithful in reading and praying. You're struggling with the thought of just throwing in the towel. You know you want to lose some weight but the biscuits know your name and they call out to you every time you walk past the cupboard. "Eat me. Eat me."

Maybe you're just finding life a bit hard and you need a banner to look to. Jehovahh Nissi is our banner. You might sympathise with Paul who writes Romans 7:15 ¹⁵ *I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.* You're like: 'I want to be a better parent and then he/she does the teenager thing and I want to scream.'

I do the very thing that I don't want to do. I totally understand what Paul is talking about there and I am so glad to know that I'm not alone in those feelings. I find a guy in the Bible named Moses, who can relate completely with my struggle, and so what we are going to talk about is the first seventeen chapters of the book of Exodus. And so three hours from now when I'm finished, you all are going to get to go home and have a good, if slightly burnt, lunch.

Moses was the child of a slave and every male child was supposed to be killed. His mother put him in a basket and put him on the river but he was found by a Princess who took care of him in the palace. He was well educated in Egypt but he also had his mother's influence because God worked it out that she was the one the princess asked for help to care for him.

Moses saw that the Israelites were suffering and tried to do things his way, killing a guard. He had to run away and ended up being a shepherd in the desert.

One day God appeared to him and told him that he was to go back and tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The Egyptians had enslaved the entire nation of Israel, and had them beat down, had them under their heel, and God said, “I want My people to be free, and I am choosing you, Moses, to go in and do the job.”

Now, let’s just put this in context for a second and think about today. If there is a nation that is being oppressed and you want to free them, what do you do? You send in big guns. You send in lots of military. You have this great big strategy for conquering the enemy and defeating them and freeing and liberating people and that kind of thing, and that was not God’s plan to liberate the people of Israel. No laser guided bombs. No elite forces. God, instead, sent in a guy with a stick.

The stick then is called the staff of God and Moses uses it to perform various miracles until, at last, Pharaoh lets the Israelites go. It’s not too long thought before they decide to go into the desert and get them back though. They catch up with them when the Israelites have reached the sea. The Israelites are panicking, and God says, “Moses, relax. Hold your stick up over the water and just watch what happens,” and as Moses obeyed God, the Bible says that the water parted, there is a wall of water over on the left, a wall of water on the right, and people of Israel walked through on dry ground and God delivered them.

But the miracles don’t stop there. Now, they are hungry and thirsty out in the wilderness. “Hey, Moses, what are we going to do? We need something to drink,” and God tells Moses, “Take the stick in your hand and go over there and hit that rock.” And so, Moses obeyed. He goes over and he hits the rock with the stick, and all of a sudden, gallons of water come gushing out of a rock, and all of the millions of people in this nation of Israel drank their fill. Miracle after miracle after miracle was worked by a guy and his stick. Now, as you can imagine, this stick was becoming somewhat legendary, and the people of Israel would watch as Moses would walk through the camp and they would say things like, “Oooh, it’s Moses and his stick.”

In combat, a banner is really important to a soldier. I guess it is significant for a couple of reasons. First of all, it stands as a symbol. It symbolizes something that is huge. Something bigger than the soldier himself, something bigger than life. It symbolizes a cause. It is that cause that motivates him. I guess the second reason that a banner is important is, it stands to inspire. Not only does it stand as a symbol, but it stands to inspire that soldier to really get outside of himself and do something that is not even normal or natural. It is natural

behavior to want to preserve your own life, to hide when somebody is shooting at you or trying to kill you, or maybe, even to run away. But when the soldier considers that inspiring symbol, the thing that that banner represents, it motivates the soldier to do something that is not natural – to go against his nature and to actually charge out and face this enemy that wants to take his life.

You know, we all face battles in our own lives, battles every day that we have to look at different banners that help us get through those battles and endure them. For some people, it is as simple as maybe their favorite sports team. That symbol that it represents will maybe inspire them to do something they wouldn't normally do, like paint their faces up or put on weird clothes and act silly, but then, maybe it is more serious than that. Maybe your banner is your family. I know a lot of people will carry pictures of their family in their wallets so that it will remind them of why they are working such long hours, or why they are spending or saving the way that they are doing it. And, maybe your banner is a religious or spiritual symbol like a Jesus fish on your bumper, or a crucifix around your neck. A banner, whatever it is, it is powerful. It is an inspiring symbol, but most of all, what makes it most important is the banner that helps us stay in the fight.

My question for you today is, “What is your fight?” What is your greatest battle right now? Right now, all of us have a battle of fight. Maybe it is your marriage. Maybe it is your job. Maybe it's just that you are fighting in life all together because you're ready to throw in the towel and give up. Whatever it is, we all need a banner to look to, something to inspire us to keep on going. To keep on keeping on. And so, here is the point of the story where we find Moses suddenly in a battle, and it is really suddenly. The Bible just takes this abrupt turn in Exodus 17, and it says all of a sudden the Amalekites were at war with the Israelites. We don't know why. It's just suddenly there was this war, and so here's Moses' brilliant strategy. I mean, he's this great military strategist. He says, “Here, you guys. I want you to run down this hill into that valley over there, and I want you to take on the bad guys, and I'm going to stand upon the hill with the staff of God in my hand and I'm going to hold it up in the air. That's it. That's the battle plan.” And the people of Israel are like, “Right on! Let's go. Let's go to it.” And so they run out there to the fight. Moses stands upon the hill and he holds up the banner, the stick, the thing that they had been looking to that had inspired them so many times before.

The Bible tells an interesting part of the story. It didn't happen immediately the way that Moses had hoped. Moses, I'm sure, ran out there thinking, “Every time I've waved this stick around something great has happened, so I'm going

to go out there, hold this stick out, and all those Amalekites are going to fall down dead,” or something, and I mean, he was just rip roaring, ready to go, and have you ever charged into a battle of your own life? “I’m going to lose weight. Ah ... yeah, go!” and you just run out there, and you hold your hand, “Come on, God,” and you are praying for the miracle. Moses expected the miracle instantaneously. In fact, every other time that a miracle had been worked through Moses and that stick, it had been an instant miracle.

Sometimes we think that God is at our disposal when we are asking for those instant miracles, and Moses was making that same mistake that day.

The Bible says as long as Moses held his hand in the air, the Israelites were winning the battle. They could see the banner. They were inspired, but when he would get weak, his arms would start to drop. They would begin to lose, and so there’s Moses holding his arms up. The Bible said that the battle took all day long. Imagine standing somewhere like this for eight, nine, and ten hours. About half way through the day, Moses couldn’t do it any longer. He was about to collapse, and he looked on one side and he felt someone push his arm up, and on the other side, someone else pushed his other arm up, and it was his friend, Hur, and his brother, Aaron, who were holding his arms up saying, “We’re not going to let you fail. We are not going to let you down.” The Bible says, the rest of the day they stood there and at the end of the day the Israelites won the battle. Moses got what he hoped for, but it wasn’t quite the way he had hoped it would happen. There’s a valuable lesson in there: God doesn’t always work like a microwave. Sometimes He’s more like a slow cooker. He takes His time. It’s a slow, simmering process, where God has to work things out to teach us something.

And here’s what Moses did. At the end of that day, when the battle was over, we see in Exodus 17:15, Moses built an altar there and called it Jehovah Nissi, the LORD is my banner. The what is my banner? The LORD is my banner. There is something significant about the fact that he is calling the LORD his banner there. Remember, at the beginning of the story, there was nothing about God saying to Moses, “Okay, Moses, here’s the plan. You go stand on the hill and hold up the stick and I’m going to work a miracle.” God never told him that. Here’s what I think happened. Moses and the people of Israel had become so enamoured with the tool that God had used to work the miracles that they forgot about the Miracle Worker, Himself. They began to look to a stick, the staff of God, for their inspiration. My question for you is this, “What’s your stick?” What have you been looking to? What banner, earthly banner, have you been looking to for your motivation in that battle that you are struggling

with right now in your own life? What's inspiring you? Maybe it's your family. Maybe it's success, or financial freedom, or independence. Whatever that banner is, it could be a good thing. But do you know what? It's just a stick. If it's not Jehovah Nissi, it's just a stick. Moses' stick is gone. It's dust. Now, if you could find it, you could probably sell it on eBay for a lot of money, but it's gone. It's history. And whatever your banner is, whatever your stick is that you've been looking to for your inspiration, if it's not the LORD, if it's not God, it's dust.

Moses started out that day looking to a stick, and in the end, he realized all that there is that really matters is Jehovah Nissi, the LORD is my banner. So, knowing this is all well and good, but what does this have to do with me in my everyday life? How is the going to help me? When you feel like giving up, Jehovah Nissi, remember this: Jehovah Nissi inspires you to never give up. There is someone out there who wants to inspire you, and it is God, Himself. What better cheerleader to have on your side?

Not only does Jehovah Nissi inspire you to never give up, Jehovah Nissi empowers you to victory. Jehovah Nissi empowers you to victory. Psalms 60:4 says, "But you have raised a banner for those who honour you, a rallying point in the face of attack." There's one that we can rally around. When we feel that we are at our weakest, not only will He inspire us, but He will give us the strength to carry on. Jehovah Nissi, the LORD is my banner.

You might be thinking, "Oh well, it's all well and good for you. You've got a calling. You are a minister." Well, there is no doubt that if you are around church for a while you will meet some of the nicest, kindest most helpful people you could ever hope to meet. Sadly, you will also meet some of the most unpleasant people you could meet. Of the people who trained with me one is no longer in ministry, three are currently off on long term sick and so many others have struggled with issues in their congregations. Having a calling doesn't exclude you from any of this. All of us will face times when we feel that we've had enough. Of course, calling helps. When things are difficult it helps to know that God has called you to a specific place or task.

Let me ask you, "What's your calling?" You don't know? All of us are called to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ, and I am betting, part of that calling for you is overcoming that battle that you thought of earlier when I asked, "What's the toughest battle in your life right now?" Don't give up the fight. Don't cave. Remember, "God is your banner.

