

Text: Exod. 17:8-16

Title: "The Lord is our banner for battle"

Time: 1/31/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: On February 23rd, 1945, toward the end of the fifth day of ferocious fighting on the island of Iwo Jima, Joe Rosenthal snapped a picture of six US Marines planting a flag atop the 554-foot Mount Suribachi's volcanic cone. Today, the iconic Pulitzer Prize winning image is memorialized in Washington D. C. along the Potomac River, in a statue that authorities have not yet found a reason to tear down. Its flag was a second larger Stars and Stripes installed so that everyone on the island could see it.

A Marine who had been there those five days explained in a 2020 National Geographic article what it felt like to see that flag in the distance. The 95-year-old Bill Montgomery said this: "What a feeling that was! I felt ecstasy! I knew it was all over! So many of us had been killed. We made it through."

Jack Thurman, a sniper who had climbed the hill with the flag unit to protect them, described its ongoing impact on those fighting to take the island: "Even after dark the artillery shells would go off, and by the flash you could see that flag up there, still waiving. Still standing. I couldn't help but think of Fort McHenry and 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. The bombs bursting in air really did give proof through the night that our flag was still there" [<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/02/iconic-world-war-ii-photo-staged-heroic-true-story>; accessed 1/28/2021].

When the apostle Paul came to the end of his life as a Christian, he looked back on what he had experienced and

described the Christian life as the keeping of the faith, as the finishing of a course, and as the fighting of a good fight (2 Tim. 4:7). Each of us as believers are engaged in the fight of spiritual warfare. The enemies we face are three – Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh. All three are in rebellion against God as forces of evil that we must fight in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our passage Israel faces the enemy Amalek in Rephadim. At the end of the battle, Moses builds an altar and gives it a name, which was the key to his nation's victory over their enemies that day: *Jehovah Nissi – The Lord is my banner* (v. 15). Just like the Marines raised their flag at Iwo Jima to inspire fellow combatants on to victory in World War 2, so also Moses raises up a banner to help us in our fight against the enemies of our Lord. We need that help this morning. We need the kind of encouragement Marines found from their banner in their battle. I want us to learn this lesson that Israel learned from their battle with the Amalekites, namely that the Lord is our banner for our battle.

I. The Lord is our banner for battles that are ongoing (v. 8).

Illustration: The National Geographic article noted that the raising of the flag did not bring an end to the fighting on Iwo Jima. The article explains: "The battle of Iwo Jima would rage for another month, claiming more than 26,000 American casualties, including 6,281 lives. But through it all, the flag atop Suribachi snapped in the stiff Pacific trade winds. The sight inspired the Marines through every war-weary day – and night."

Application: When the apostle Paul looked back on a long life of serving the Lord with thankful satisfaction that he had fought a good fight, he was not just talking about a

single battle he had experienced. No, spiritual warfare is an ever-present, lifelong reality. The enemies in rebellion against the Lord that would destroy us are relentless, experienced, and powerful. Spiritual war never stops.

Amalek is an ever-present enemy in the history of Israel. Time and again this nation is going to threaten the safety and well-being of God's people. Some believe they were descendants from the grandson of Esau, but I believe that Esau's grandson was named *Amalek* after the nation and not vice versa. Num. 24:18-20 describes Amalek as the first among nations, one independent from the contemporary nation of Edom, of which Esau's grandson, Amalek, was one of three chiefs (Gen. 36:16).

Amalek is an enemy that simply does not go away in the pages of the Old Testament: (1) they defeat Israel in league with Eglon and Moab (Judg. 3:13); (2) they raided Israel's harvest in league with the Midianites (Judg. 6:3, 33, 7:12, 10:12); (3) they do battle with King Saul, who loses his throne because he spared their king (1 Sam. 14:48-15:32, 28:18); (4) they return David's raids with counterraid, at one point distressingly successfully (1 Sam. 27:8, 30:1, 13, 16, 18, 2 Sam. 1:1); (5) it was an Amalekite who killed Saul, incurring David's wrath (2 Sam. 1:8, 13); (6) David ultimately subdues Amalek as one of his enemies (2 Sam. 8:11); although (7) sons of the tribe of Simeon must also defeat Amalekites who had taken refuge in Edom (1 Chron. 4:43); (8) Josephus calls Haman, the enemy of Mordecai and Esther, an Amalekite (Jos. Antiq. xi. 6.6). Whether or not that last citing is true, Haman's biblical label, *an Agagite*, certainly reminds readers of the kings of Amalek named *Agag*.

So, what does Amalek teach us about the enemies we face as believers today? Very simply, they are not going to go

away either until Jesus returns or we go to Him. Every day our feet hit the floor as we climb out of bed, Satan is ready to use the world to lie to us and to murder us, and our sinful flesh within is ready to believe his lies and self-destruct in the sin that comes so naturally to us. We must not face these foes with natural ability. We are one of our own worst enemies, so our victory in spiritual warfare must come from a power far greater than our own, which brings us to our second lesson about our spiritual battles this morning.

II. The Lord is our banner for battles that are won with the rod (vv. 9-11).

Illustration: David Rohl believes this battle against Amalek occurred on ground that was much more hospitable than the island of Iwo Jima. He locates the battleground at a place today called Sheikh Abu Taleb. What is fascinating about this open plain, suitable for the kind of battle described in this text, is that it is interrupted by a protruding hill in the middle of it. Today, that hill is called *Gebel Musa* or *the hill of Moses*.

Application: It was from the vantage point of that hill that Israel experienced another thing that was very much unlike the experience of the Marines on Iwo Jima. Moses raises his rod on that hill, and Israel prevails. When he gets tired and the rod comes down, Amalek prevails. Unlike the flag at the summit of Suribachi, the rod of Moses is a supernatural key to Israel's victory.

To understand the significance of this for our own spiritual battles, we must remember what else the rod of Moses has done in this context. Earlier in the chapter, God tells Moses to use his rod to strike a rock so that life-giving water could flow from it for His people. We remember that Christ is the rock of our salvation, and the water that flows from Him is

the stream that cleanses us from all our sins and revives our hearts with eternal life.

The rod in that picture is the instrument that struck Christ. It is the cross of Calvary. It was when Jesus was struck by the cross that His sacrifice provided the atonement which is the source of eternal life for all who believe. Have you been given this new life? It is freely offered to all who repent of their sins and believe in this source of salvation from sin.

So, viewing the rod as the cross, we see that Calvary not only gives us the water of new life, but also provides the supernatural victory we need on the battlefield against Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh. All we have to do is lift it up in the midst of our battles. We win our spiritual battles to the degree we lift high the cross of Christ. When the enemy attacks, it is the cross that is our defense.

With each need for courageous love, we remember the love of the cross. With each successful blow the enemy lands against us, we remember that our sins are forgiven because of the cross. How is it that you and I can have any hope of victory over our spiritual enemies today? The only hope is that Jesus has died. We must lift high the cross for victory.

Illustration: Horatius Bonar, a 19th century Scotch Free Presbyterian and one of my favorite theologians and hymn writers, adorned this amazing and powerful truth in his song, "Hallelujah for the Cross!":

The cross it standeth fast,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Defying ev'ry blast,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
The winds of hell have blown,  
The world its hate hath shown,

Yet it is not overthrown,  
Hallelujah for the cross!

It is the old cross still,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Its triumph let us tell,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
The grace of God here shone  
Thro' Christ the blessed Son,  
Who did for sin atone,  
Hallelujah for the cross!

'Twas here the debt was paid,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Our sins on Jesus laid,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
So round the cross we sing  
Of Christ our offering,  
Of Christ our living King,  
Hallelujah for the cross!

Our battles are won with the rod, the cross of Calvary.  
Fight on, Fellow-Soldier, no, not despairingly, but with  
loud "Hallelujahs" for the cross.

III. The Lord is my banner for battles that are won together  
(vv. 12-13).

Application: I believe that it is important as we interpret the events of the life of Moses and apply them to our lives today to remember that our Moses is Christ (Heb. 3:1-2, John 5:46). In this passage, Moses is much weaker than our Savior was. Jesus endured the cross alone to the bitter end, though Moses had trouble lifting his rod high on his own throughout the length of this battle.

But then I am reminded that Scripture also tells us that Christ's church is His body, and that it is there in His body that Jesus uses the weak things of the world to fight these dangerous spiritual battles. In the weakness of Moses we see the weakness of the church, the weak things of the world that God has chosen for His battles.

There is nothing weak about the rock Moses sits on, just as our cornerstone as the church is unshaken, for it is Christ. And founded on the cornerstone that cannot fail and will never droop, the arms of the church do their best to lift high the cross against the enemies of the souls of men.

The help Moses receives from Aaron and Hur reminds us that Christ's body is designed to have many parts. These battles must be won together with each of us doing our part. What is your part? What would have happened to Israel that day if Aaron and Hur fulfilled their role the way you and I fulfill ours? Perhaps that is why our churches are losing so many of the battles we face today. Have we taken up our cross and followed Christ as His church into battle?

IV. The Lord is my banner for battles that must be won generation after generation (vv. 14-16).

Application: Joshua was the leader of a new generation, about 45-years-old at this point. The battles of his fathers were to be written down and put into his ears. The banner of the hand lifting the rod must inspire each new generation anew. They must see the victory the Lord provides through the cross to defeat their enemies. He makes war with Amalek generation after generation.

Conclusion: So how goes the fight today? I wonder how often we have been fighting the unavoidable spiritual

battles against our enemies with no help from our banner. Do we take hit after hit succumbing to the enemy's attacks having forgotten that the Lord is our banner, that His cross is our victory, that we are members of His churches fighting arm-in-arm together, and that those who come behind us need us to raise this banner high with its truth ringing in their ears?

Faithfulness or defeat, what shall it be? That question will be answered every day, one day at a time, according to whether the Lord is our banner for battle. When we look to Him, it is never a fair fight. C. H. Macintosh reflects upon the futility of God's enemies: "The believer approaches to the battle signing, 'Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (1 Cor. xv. 57.) . . . 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' (Rom. viii. 37.)" (2.233).

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*