

Exodus 17 sermon

My name is Scott and I am the administrative pastor at our church. My main responsibility is taking care of ministries and planning behind the scenes, but I occasionally get a chance to preach as well. During one of my last times preaching, a lady approached me after the service and asked what I do when I am not preaching. Ma'am, I said, I pray a whole lot.

So here we are today.

I would like to teach from one of my favorite Old Testament passages. This isn't one of the more famous stories like Noah and the ark or David and Goliath, but it is one that has really impacted me. Especially over the last few years.

But before we do that, I know that we have a lot of kiddos in the room so I am going to give you a challenge. I want you to raise your arms straight straight over your head, and as I am talking, I want you to keep them up as long as possible. At the end of the sermon, we are going to see how many of you were able to keep your arms raised. Deal?

Ex 17:8–16.

8 Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10 So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. 13 And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. 14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a

memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” 15 And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord Is My Banner, 16 saying, “A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

There are **many lessons** to consider when looking at this story, but I am going to try to highlight several of the things this passage teaches us.

First, let's take a look at what happened in the scriptures themselves. To **give the background** to the story, The Israelites have just recently escaped through the Red Sea from Pharaoh's army. The Israelites had been in bondage for 400 years and have been delivered by God, but they don't truly know their God.

They have seen him work in mighty ways, from the 10 plagues in Egypt to being led by a pillar of fire smoke to having water come from a rock. But the journey has been difficult and the people are still complaining to Moses about God's provision.

Is God all-powerful? Can he continue to protect them? Can he continue to provide for them? Can the God of Israel be trusted?

It is during this time that the people are **attacked by the Amalekites**. The Amalekites were nomadic raiders and descendants of Esau. They attacked the Israelites who were lagging behind the rest of the nation, as these were easy targets.

Moses commissions a young warrior named Joshua to lead the Israelites in battle against the Amalekites. This is the first time that we see Joshua in the scriptures, and while he will eventually become a great general and leader of the Israelites, in this story he is simply a warrior who is leading the army.

I think it is important to note that **Joshua will have great success** (and a few failures) over the years, but his first appearance in the scriptures isn't to model his brilliant leadership or battle strategy, but rather to show that **God is the one who provides the victory.**

Moses tells Joshua that he will lead the army in battle, but that Moses will go up on the hill. Moses won't simply be on the hill to watch, but to **intercede with the God of Israel on Israel's behalf.**

Moses climbs the hill with two other leaders, **Hur and Aaron.** We don't know much about Hur except that he was trusted by Moses. Aaron, of course, was Moses's brother and second in command of Israel.

The battle begins, but the **armies** appear pretty **evenly matched.**

The battle is being won by the Israelites only when Moses's hands are lifted. When he begins to tire, the Israelites begin to lose. Keep in mind that Moses was around 80 years old at the time. Holding anything over your head is tiring, but especially holding it for hours at a time.

My first mission trip was to a place called Papua New Guinea. It is still one of the most remote areas on earth. In order to prepare for the rough living conditions, we had to attend a boot camp where we learned how to make our own food, live out of a tent, do laundry in a bucket, and memorize lot's of scripture.

In the boot camp was an obstacle course, and one of the hardest parts of the course was a 10 foot wall that we had to climb over. Now obviously most of us couldn't climb over the wall by ourselves, so we had to work together as a team. Once we got the first person on top of the wall, they would help pull the others up. But while they were doing that, the rest of us would stand at the bottom of the wall with our hands above our heads ready to catch the person climbing if they fell. We had to stand this way while the 30 members of our team climbed up and over the wall, and all of us had aching shoulders and arms when we finished.

John D. Hannah,

Moses' holding the staff of God (cf. Ex. 4:20) above his head with both hands symbolized Israel's total dependence on the power of God. When Moses lowered his hands, a picture of lack of dependence, the enemy was winning.

Aaron and Hur see Moses struggling and step in to help. This is my favorite part of the story. **God has called Moses to intercede for the army of Israel, but he wasn't meant to do it alone.** Two men who Moses trusts come alongside to help him out. They bring him a stone to sit on and then stand on either side of him to support his arms.

The staff stays raised, and the Israelites win the battle.

Who won the battle? The soldiers on the front line or the 3 on the mountain?

D.A. Carson

When Moses held up his hands, it is symbolizing the divine power that is key to Israel's military success. It may also serve to bolster the faith and courage of those engaged in the fight below. In any case, it clearly focuses the reader's attention primarily on the hill and not on the battlefield, suggesting this is where the victory is truly won. Like the earlier conflict with the Egyptians, Israel prevails through the Lord.

This is a great passage of scripture and one that has several lessons.

One thing that has become more clear to me over the last few years is how important it is to **have community. We are created for it.** In fact, if you look at the scriptures, it is very clear that we are not meant to experience the Christian walk alone. We see this over and over in Paul's new testament letters to the church.

So our first lesson is that we were created for community

In Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Community helps us live the Christian life because when we see others living for the Lord, we are encouraged by it.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

In Romans 12:10 NIV

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

We are given community to help carry the burden.

In Galatians 6:2 NIV

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

This is something that has always amazed me about this passage. God gave Moses a task that he was never meant to do alone!

Think about that. Often times we are called to obedience, but we are playing a part in something much bigger than ourselves. And often times, God uses these situations to force us to rely on him as well as on others.

I was an elementary school administrator for 8 years. During that time I came to love the staff, the students and the community. I knew God had put me in that place for his purposes. My final year at OCRS, I came down with full blown pneumonia. The Dr.s had put me on three different

antibiotics and were threatening to hospitalize me if the third antibiotic couldn't get control of the fluid in my lungs.

During this time, the school community was going through some very difficult times. Several of our staff members and our students had lost family members. In addition to that, I felt that God was preparing me to go into full-time ministry, but I was torn as to if the timing was right for me to leave the school.

In the middle of all this, I headed to school though I couldn't even complete a sentence without coughing. I told myself that I wasn't being hard-headed. I truly was trying to do the job of leading the school that God had given me. After checking in with my secretary and assistant principal, they insisted that I go back home as I was no good to anyone in that current state.

I left and pulled into my driveway where I called my brother Shane and poured out my heart. I was tired of being sick. I felt like I was letting everyone down. I felt that I couldn't do the job God had called me to do and was a failure.

Shane listened to me patiently and then said, **“Scott, you are great at following the Lord, but you are terrible at resting in Him.”** He reminded me that we are called to obedience, but it is the Lord who takes care of the results. He assured me that while the Lord had put me at that school, he didn't need me there to work his purposes. He was capable enough without me.

I got off the phone and walked into my house, where my wife (who had told me not to go to work) asked what I was doing home. I poured out my heart to her, to which she told me, **“Scott, you are great at following the Lord, but you are terrible at resting in him.”** Immediately I said, wait a minute, did Shane just call you? She told me no and immediately I realized God was trying to teach me something about rest. To teach me about depending on Him and on others, even while trying to fulfill the work he had given me.

We see this in Scripture in other places as well.

Numbers 11:16-17 NIV

“The Lord said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.”

Another reason we are given community is to help with the journey.

Mark 6:7-8, 10-13 NIV

“Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

Jesus sent out his Disciples to tell Israel that the Kingdom of God had come, but he didn’t send them alone. He sent them with a partner.

We are given community for wise counsel.

We see this over and over in the Proverbs such as in Proverbs 11:14

Proverbs 11:14 NIV

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.”

This is part of the reason that Rivertree is Elder led. All of the elders love Jesus and all of us are doing our daily best to follow him, but there is

something to be said when a group of people are searching the scriptures, praying, and seeking God's will on how best to lead the congregation.

So we see that God has called us to community and he often uses community to help us accomplish the work he has put before us.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 24-27 NIV

“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

The next big lesson is that

Jesus is foreshadowed in this passage.

Matthew Henry,

No doubt it was a great encouragement to the people to see Joshua before them in the field of battle and Moses above them upon the top of the hill: Christ is both to us—our Joshua, the captain of our salvation who fights our battles, and our Moses, who, in the upper world, ever lives making intercession, that our faith fail not.

Jesus is our advocate.

1 John 2:1 NIV

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”

Romans 8:34 NIV

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

Hebrews 7:25-27 NIV

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.”

We also see that

Jesus fights for us.

Exodus 14:14 NIV

“The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.””

Joshua 23:10 NIV

“One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised.”

Revelation 19:11 NIV

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.”

A couple of years ago, my son was having a difficult time with some classmates in school. He was often the brunt of their jokes and desperately wanted to be accepted. I told him son, I want you to do something today. When I drop you off, I want you to envision the Creator of the universe getting out of the car with you. I want you to imagine that the King of Kings is walking the halls and sitting next to you. Whenever you

feel insecure or that you don't fit in, remember that Jesus is right there with you. If you are loved and accepted by the God of all creation, that should be enough.

Since then, the Holy Spirit has had to remind me of those very words when I am feeling inadequate, but the truth is that we have a God who never sends us into battle alone, but who advocates and fights for us.

So as we finish up, how many hands do we still have in the air? Great job!

If you still have your hands up, you can ask those sitting next to you to help you out as we finish our message!

God calls us to community. We are to rely on his strength and often on the support of those around us for prayer support, encouragement, wisdom, and accountability.

I want to give you a challenge. I would love for you to pray this week and ask the Lord, in this season of life, are you a Moses who needs to ask others around you to pray on your behalf? Or are you Aaron and Hur, who need to come alongside another believer and support them as they follow the path God has chosen for them?

The Battle is the Lord's but we are to do our part in obedience. And we are to surround ourselves with Christian community that will cheer us on to His good works while praying for our faithfulness.

Kiddos, great work. You can put your hands down.

Let's pray.

Questions-
1.