

Exodus 17

Series: Who Is God?
Jehovah-Nissi
The LORD Our Banner

On September 17, 2011 a series of demonstrations started in Zuccotti Park, located in New York City's Wall Street financial district. The protests were declared against social and economic inequality, high unemployment, greed, corruption, and the undue influence of corporations—particularly that of the financial services sector—on government.

I would guess that most of us would agree that some of the concerns of the protestors were justified. Most of us are wearied by the ongoing unemployment and foreclosure rates. When we find out that a corporation like GE that reported \$5.1 billion last year says, “We expect to have a small U.S. income tax liability,” we’re understandably troubled because on April 15 we’re going to expect to have not-so-small US income tax liabilities.

But what happened to the Occupy Wall Street movement has been repeated a thousand times down through history.

On November 16, 1969 I traveled, along with several other college students from Indiana, PA to our Nation’s capital for a massive march against the direction the Vietnam war had taken.

The Park Service estimated that 500,000 people walked the streets of Washington, DC. There were students, families, children, and people of all ages.

Wherever you stood on the war as it was being carried out, I think we all support the right of citizens to express their views.

But as we were walking down near Dupont Circle something happened that really changed my perspective. The protestors were peaceful. The police were lined up along the street. And suddenly I watched a whole group of Weather Underground radicals pull soda bottles out from under their coats.

In unison they started hurling those soda bottles over their heads and down on the police. The officers had no idea where the bottles were coming from and in the confusion a bunch of peaceful protesters were injured.

But the Yippies were known for street theater and they weren’t finished yet. I watched them put on head scarves and bandannas that looked like they were

bloodied and then they jumped right in the fray as if the police had beaten them.

You have to remember there were news people all over DC so as soon as some action started they were right there filming. Only what people saw on their TV news that night wasn't radicals pelting the police with glass bottles, it was police supposedly beating protestors.

It all happened in an instant, but at that moment I saw how quickly a movement of hundreds of thousands could be hijacked by a few dozen troublemakers.

That's some of what happened to the occupy Wall Street movement. When your banners begin to define you as something outlandish or bizarre, the movement crumbles.

Here's some Occupy Wall Street signs, that in my personal opinion, really hurt the cause. And as I show you these I'd ask you to think before you laugh or poke fun. These banners are a window into where some people are in our country.

I Made A Sign

Abolish Capitalism/Fight For Socialism

One day The Poor Will Have Nothing To Eat But The Rich

Obama

\$96 Thousand For A Degree

Arrested Development

Left Wing Military Coup

A banner or a sign can define a whole movement. It can lift it up or drag it down.

Now let me ask you, what banner defines you? What banner inspires you. What banner empowers you?

This is week 3 of a series we're calling *Who Is God?* What we're doing in these messages is looking at names of God in the Bible to see just what they tell us about His nature and character. We're not trying to define God

according to our own understanding. We're letting God define Himself through His Word.

This morning we want to look at another compound Hebrew name Jehovah-Nissi or The LORD Our Banner.

Open to Exodus chapter 17 page 70

The biblical book of Exodus takes us on a 430-year journey. God had led Joseph and his family to Egypt and preserved them from a famine. But eventually Joseph and his immediate family died off. His people, the Jewish people, were growing in number and finally the Pharaoh of Egypt enslaved the Jews and used them in his work projects.

Over the years the situation grew grimmer and more menacing. Finally, in a desperate measure to contain the Jews in his country, *Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive."* (Exodus 1:22)

The people groaned before their God and cried out for deliverance. Finally, at the appointed time He raised up Moses to be their deliverer.

Moses was a shepherd so he carried a shepherd's staff. It was just an old piece of dead, dried out wood but God told Moses from now on it's not your staff anymore. Now it's the rod of God.

Moses took that rod and went into Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world at that time, and laid out God's demands. Actually they weren't real complicated. They were comprised of 4 words. God just said through Moses, "Let My people go."

That request didn't go over too well with the Egyptian king. Here he was the most powerful ruler in the world and he wasn't about to give in to the demands of some foreign God name Jehovah.

His actual name was Amenhotep II. The term "Pharaoh" was a title, like "president." A Pharaoh was an Egyptian king who was considered to be a living god and worshipped as a deity. The Pharaoh was an absolute ruler of Egypt, both the political and religious leader.

But God had plans for Amenhotep II. Through a series of 10 plagues the Egyptian deities were mocked and disgraced.

Finally after loosing his firstborn son to the 10th plague, Pharaoh sent the people of Israel away. Of course they only got to the shore of the Red Sea until the mighty Pharaoh changed his mind and charged out after them with his warrior army.

God had a purpose for Pharaoh. Here's what He said, *But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.* (Exodus 9:16)

One of Amenhotep II's claims to fame was his excellent marksmanship. He could ride a chariot at full speed with the reins tied around his waist and then shoot a bow and arrow with deadly accuracy.

I. Tough Times Don't Mean That God Has Forgotten Us

Suddenly all the people who were so happy about leaving Egypt were having second thoughts. As they saw the dust rising from Pharaoh's massive army as it bore down on them the Bible says, *The children of Israel cried out to the LORD. Then they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?"* (Exodus 14:11)

Did you get that? Ten plagues, great deliverance, leading of God and all of a sudden all that's forgotten. "We're going to die out here."

Of course, that's not what happens.

In that famous scene from the movie *The Ten Commandments* Charlton Heston raises up his staff and quotes the exact words from Exodus 14:13 *Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.* (Exodus 14:13)

The Red Sea splits, the Israelites go across on dry ground, and the waters eventually come crashing back on the Egyptians and drown the whole army.

I mean, could you image living all this. I've never seen anything like this. Have you?

It's one thing to read the biblical text. It's one thing to see the movie. I don't know if you've ever seen the original Cecil B. De Mille movie. It's not the one with Charlton Heston that they show every Easter season. It was actually made in 1923 without sound. I have a copy and it's really amazing to watch. It was considered to be on the forefront of special effects in its day. The visual effect of keeping the walls of water apart while the Israelites walked through was accomplished with a slab of Jell-O that was sliced in two and filmed close up as it jiggled. This shot was then combined with live-action footage of Israelites walking into the distance, creating a near-perfect illusion.

Listen. Running through the Red Sea while Pharaoh's army was charging in the distance had absolutely no resemblance to jiggling Jello. This was the absolute most awesome, terrifying event these people would ever go through in their entire lives.

This was how they had to learn the lesson that tough times don't mean that God has forgotten us. They could have had all the classroom instruction. They could have had all the dynamic sermons. They could have read books, listened to lectures from Moses. They could have even watched a Cecil B. De Mille movie but they weren't going to get it any other way.

Why do we have to go through the stuff we go through in life? Is it because God gets some kind of sadistic pleasure out of seeing us suffer? Is it because God enjoys our pain?

Listen, God more than anyone else knows what its like for us to experience pain. When Jesus Christ went to the cross He internalized the sin and the suffering of this world. That's why the Bible says He's a High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses.

God doesn't take pleasure in our suffering. It pains Him. But He does take pleasure in what our suffering produces when we let patience have her perfect work.

I. Tough Times Don't Mean That God Has Forgotten Us

II. We Choose The Attitude We Have During Difficult Times

The people had a big party and Moses was their hero, till they ran out of water. Then they complained again. They saw all that God had done but it wasn't long until they doubted Him again. So God provided water.

Everybody's happy again for a day or two then they're out of food. So what do they do? They start the cycle all over again. "God you brought us out here in the desert to die!"

Hello! As if the God who split the sea couldn't come up with something for them to eat. Fortunately there was a Chipotle halfway between Elim and Sinai so they all got a burrito.

That didn't happen by the way. God made bread from heaven, Manna to feed them.

We choose the attitude we have during difficult times. They made bad choices, and sometimes so do we. Rather than praising God sometimes our first response is to complain. Why, when we have such a great and faithful God?

But wait, there's more. Just when it seemed they'd learned the lesson of God's provision God led them into another situation of testing.

Exodus 17 verses 1-4

I can just hear Moses saying to God, "I can't take this any more. Every time I do what You say to do, something else happens and I end up being the bad guy."

We'll Moses needed to be tested so he could learn the same lesson his people needed to learn. God is there and God is trustworthy.

Read verses 5-7

What a question people were asking. *"Is the LORD among us or not?"*

Have you ever been guilty of asking a question like that? Is God here or isn't He? If He's here how come He's not rearranging my life the way I want it? If He's here how come I have to suffer. If He's here why is my husband a jerk or

my wife nagging me to death? Why aren't my kids straightening out? How come my job's falling apart? How come my doctor's just told me what I don't want to hear?

I. Tough Times Don't Mean That God Has Forgotten Us

II. We Choose The Attitude We Have During Difficult Times

III. The LORD Our Banner Guides Us Through The Battles Of Life

Read Verse 8

Back around 2000 BC God chose a man named Abram out of a world that had long since forgotten the true and living God. God promised to make Abram's name great and to bless the world through his descendants.

Abram experienced some bumps in the road but eventually he grew in his faith towards God. Abram had 2 sons, Isaac, the father of the Jewish people, and Ishmael the father of the Arabs.

Isaac was the son of the promise who inherited the promises of God and Isaac had two sons of his own Jacob and Esau. The Jewish people came through Jacob and the Edomites came through Esau.

Just like there was always tension between the Jews and the Arabs, there was always friction between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau.

Amalek was a son of Esau's first-born son Eliphaz. And from day one Amalek set out to cause trouble for the Jews.

So here Moses leads over a million refugees into Amalek's back yard. That obviously annoyed Amalek and so Amalek fought against Israel in Rephidim.

This is going to be some more tough times for Israel. They weren't trying to pick a fight. They were just following God's leadership, but it was going to become evident right here, that following God meant facing challenges.

Read verses 9-11

This is the first place that Joshua is mentioned in the Bible. His name is significant like many Hebrew names, *Jehoshua* means "Jehovah is salvation."

So he went out to fight against the enemy and Moses, his brother Aaron, and a guy named Hur went up to the top of the hill over looking that battle scene.

Now notice, as long as Moses held his hand up, Israel won the battle, but when he let his hand down Amalek came out on top.

Some people see this as some type of Jewish folklore and magic. As if Moses' hands really conveyed some magical power. Hold them up and you win. Let them drop and the other guys win.

As I read this I really don't think that's what God is trying to get across here at all. Something else was happening.

When you go back to the time in Egypt, Moses asked God, *But suppose [the people] will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'* (Exodus 4:1)

God says, "Take out the rod of God, that will be proof enough."

Then when Pharaoh doesn't let the people go, God through Moses brings a series of plagues.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood.'" (Exodus 7:19)

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.'" (Exodus 8:5)

So the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.'" (Exodus 8:16)

And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. (Exodus 9:23)

So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. (Exodus 10:13)

When they got to the Red Sea what did Moses do? He stretched out his rod.

I have to believe that by this time the people were getting the idea. The rod symbolized God's power and might.

Read verses 12- 15

When the battle was over and Israel had won, Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah-Nissi, The LORD Is My Banner.

The dictionary defines "banner" this way: "sign, placard, poster, notice, flag, standard, ensign, or pennant."

A banner inspires us to never give up. A banner empowers us to victory.

It wasn't some kind of voodoo that caused Israel to win when Moses held his staff up. I believe it was the sight of his staff that pushed them on to victory. The Israelites already knew that the rod of God was powerful. They had seen it in action. They knew that God could take a piece of dead wood and infuse it with life.

And so Moses built an altar to worship God and he named it a very significant name. The LORD, Jehovah is our banner. Not a piece of wood, not a slogan, not a sign. Those things all have passing significance. God is our banner. So let me ask you this morning, what banner have you been looking to?

For Israel they faced one deterrent after another. Heat, thirst, hunger, armies.

I believe when they looked up on that hillside and saw Moses holding his staff up for hours on end it meant everything to them.

When Joshua and Hur held Moses tired hands up they were all lifting up the banner of the Lord together. What they were doing was just as important as what the men on the battlefield were doing.

There's a lot of us in this room that feel like we're on the battlefield right now. In fact it's probably not just most, it's all. So what is your greatest battle?

What is your greatest obstacle that you're facing right now?

I know mine. What is yours? People in the occupy Wall Street movement believe injustice and greed are their greatest enemies. But it seems like every waco from the leftist end of the spectrum has hijacked their message.

They've lost sight of the goal because the goal's been diluted with everything from communism to revolution.

Joshua and Hur didn't let their message become diluted. It was about one thing and one thing only. The LORD our banner.

My question for you is this, "What's your banner?" 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. You've got that picture of your kids in your wallet. That's a good thing. Maybe it's success, or financial freedom, or independence. Whatever that banner is, it could be a good thing.

But do you know what? If it's not Jehovah-Nissi, it's just a stick. Moses' stick is gone. It's dust.

Think about it, if you could find it, you could probably sell it on eBay for a lot of money, but you can't do that because 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 with a staff but 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 you and me in my everyday life?

You say, "How is this going to help me? I am at my wits end. I really feel like giving up."

I want you to write this down. 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? What better cheerleader to have on your side than God?

And here's what He's saying, "Come on, you can do it. I don't want you to fail. I want you to hang in there."

"One day 2000 years ago I stepped into our world and went to a cross.

One day 2000 years ago I became the ultimate deliverance. I didn't quit. I had every reason to say, 'That's it. I give up but I knew that there was something more important than My own personal comfort. And that's your forgiveness.'

Jehovah our banner is our hope for this life and for all eternity.

This is how awesome God is. Just suppose you sat in a courtroom with someone who admittedly had murdered someone you love. Supposed they confessed. Everybody knew they were guilty.

And then the judge said "I just feel sorry for the guy so I'm dropping all charges." How would you feel about that? I have to believe you'd stand up in the courtroom and cry out for justice. A sense of justice is implanted within our hearts.

Now listen to this: We're all guilty before the judge of heaven. You only have to break one law to become a lawbreaker and we've broken plenty of laws.

The just judge of heaven doesn't say, "No problem, you can all go free." He says, "The wages of sin is death, and that's what you all deserve."

But then Jehovah Nissi became our sacrifice.

The Bible says, *...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed.* (I Peter 2:24)

The charges weren't dropped. That wouldn't be just. The punishment was allotted out, was apportioned out in full.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6 & 8)

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died

for our sins according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 5:3)

Why is Jehovah our banner? Because He became our Savior. His justice was satisfied.

Listen to I John 1 John 2:12: *I write to you, little children, Because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.*

Are your sins forgiven today? Can you say that with assurance and authority?

Is the Savior, your Savior? If He is then He's your banner.

Here's what the Bible says: *And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious. (Isaiah 11:10)*