

The LORD is My Banner

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[0:00] I have another reading from the Word of God, and it is from Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10-20.

! Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Amen.

[2:08] May God bless the reading of this Word. A very brief prayer. Lord God Almighty, as we have just read, I do pray that words may be given to me in opening my mouth to proclaim the gospel, to proclaim your Word. May it be anointed by the Holy Spirit, for if you do not bless the Word, then all is futile. So help me God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So my sermon title for tonight is The Lord is My Banner, taken from the first reading in Exodus, where Moses said, The Lord is My Banner. And the first thing I want to highlight before we have my three points is, what is a banner? In 11, and I say a chapter 11, I change the word signal into banner.

All the other translations have that as banner. And a banner, or you could have it as a standard, or an ensign, or a flag. And the reason the ESV translates it into signal is because a banner communicates. It sends out a message. A banner is doing something. And in the context of the sermon and where it is in Exodus and the other readings, you'll see it has a very, kind of tonight, we'll have a very martial sort of military context, even from the song, We Just Stand, about going forth as soldiers of Christ with the banner of Jesus Christ our Lord. And we don't tend to place the same value militarily on banners as they once did, although I think it's fair to say flags have become a fairly contentious issue in the country. Indeed, I think the Union Jack of all flags has become very contentious in our own country. But I'll pass that comment by very quickly. I don't think we need to get into any politics.

But it is quite clear, the point remains, that flags, banners, are important. They still have meaning. Militarily, they don't have the same meaning. But if we go back in history, for example, the time of the Roman legions, the famous eagle, the Roman eagle, that was the Roman standard. And each legion had its standard, a Roman eagle. And it was considered one of the most important things that they carried. So, the Roman eagle was actually represented Rome. And it was regarded as a huge disgrace on a legion if they lost an eagle in battle. And in AD 9, there was three legions, got annihilated actually in Germany. And a couple of decades later, Augustus' successor sent out some legions to Germany with a main purpose of getting back those standards, the eagles. That was the main purpose he sent out men to battle, was to get those standards back, to get them back into the hands of

Rome. So important were the standard, so important was the banner. And they have become, going back in military history, the banner or the colours were always very important. And I'll come to that.

But the standard bearer in Roman times, that was a key position because it had a huge impact on the whole legion and indeed in other military contexts, that standard, that banner. Trooping of the colour, for example, most of us are familiar with the trooping of the colour. And it's thought that the history behind that was that they would troop the standard or the colours or the banner through the troops so that they would know what their standard or banner was. Because the banner served a multitude of purposes in that military context to the troops, whether it was Rome, whether it was back in medieval times, whether it was in Scottish clan times, the banner, the colours, the standard held huge importance. And I said that the ESV translated a signal because the banner communicates something.

[6:41] And one of the things it communicates is who leads them, who they belong to. It would serve as an encouragement to the troops. They would remember what their cause was. It served as a rallying point.

People would gather round a banner and it unites people. And in terms of uniting people, even in the last two weeks, the World Cup has been going on. Many of you are aware, some of you will be glued to it, some of you will be fed up of it. But the flags, national flags over the last three weeks, they almost serve the same purpose. They unite people. They will rally round it. If they landed in America, the Norwegians, the Scottish, whoever, they would see the national flag, that would be where their way would go. So, a banner is always pushing out a message and people respond to it in some of those ways. So, my first point, so that's a banner. And my first point of three, and I'll take a point from each of the three readings, is quite simply the banner raised in battle. And that is from Exodus 17, when Moses says, built the altar after the battle, and he said, the Lord is my banner. And during that fight against the Amalekites, Moses' hands were held up and the rod, this staff, this rod was raised up signifying God. This was, the rod was almost the banner. It was the same rod used to strike the rock.

It was the same rod used to part the Red Sea. And the rod in itself had no power, but the rod in itself represented God. In the same way that during that, when Moses said, the Lord is my banner, what he was emphasizing to the people was that the power did not belong to Moses. However great a leader he may have been, however influential he may have been, the power that brought about the victory for the people of God was the Lord himself. Moses was simply a messenger, a servant, a prophet, yes, a mighty man of God, and hugely influential, but it was the power of God that caused them to win the battle. And this is why at the end he was careful to raise that altar and say, the Lord is my banner.

The Lord is my banner. Jehovah Nisi is my banner. And in terms of the banner being raised today, the banner is raised every time we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. When the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in His life, in His crucifixion, in His burial, in His resurrection, in His ascension, when the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, the banner of the Lord is being raised like a battle cry. And it is a battle, the battle that we face is against the world and the flesh and the devil. That spiritual battle that we read of in Ephesians chapter 6 is at its height, it peaks, as it were, when the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. That is the banner going forward. That is the battle cry for the people of God is Jesus Christ and Him crucified. What's on the banner? The cross of Christ.

[10:23] Because it's in the cross of Christ we see the justice of God, the mercy of God, the love of God, the power of God, the faithfulness of God, and the power is always in the gospel. In the same way that Moses said, the Lord is my banner, this was the power that won the battle. As Paul says in Romans chapter 1, he said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. Why am I not ashamed of the gospel? Because it's the gospel that's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believed. The power is not the messenger, no matter how gifted he may be. The power is not the size of the church, how the aesthetics of the church, the audio of the church. The power is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ on whom crucified is the power of the gospel. Paul was not a powerful man in many ways. Apparently he was through history, he's always been known as physically, nothing about him that would, he didn't have huge presence, so to speak. Yet he became the most influential, one of the most influential men in all of history, I think it's fair to say, the apostle Paul, if not the most influential man outside of Christ. That's something that could be debated, but there's no question.

But this man had nothing about him physically, personally. He was not known as a gifted orator, gifted speaker, and yet he helped to transform the world because he held faithful that the gospel of Jesus Christ has very real power. This is the banner, and this is the power that changes lives.

It's the power that saves us. It's the power that transforms us. It's the power that heals us. It's the power that restores us. Hold up the gospel of Christ. Hold up the cross of Christ, and we're holding up the banner in battle, and that battle never ends. That battle is raging.

The world is against the cross of Christ. The flesh is naturally against the cross of Christ, and the devil is seeking to diminish the cross of Christ. To stand up here and preach on morals is okay, easy. To preach the gospel of Christ attracts opposition, and it attracts opposition in this world. And that is standing up. That is holding the banner up in battle. And the other key thing that the holding up the banner does is, think of a medieval battle. And the nature of them was that they didn't have uniforms then. Just one or two of the very, very wealthy lords had uniforms then.

Most of the soldiers, most of those in battle, you couldn't differentiate one from the other. And the battles then were absolutely brutal. You know, I said this morning, I was at Helmsborough, and I said, you know, I like reading that sort of historical fiction type book. And whether it goes back to the Greeks, the Romans, medieval times. But the reality is the battles then were absolutely brutal, unbelievably painful. And, you know, I watch the movies, you read the books, and you can kind of get stirred up about it. Or maybe it's just me. And think, you know, yeah, get fighting in a battle as a man. The reality is it was absolutely horrendous. It was a horrendous, awful experience. And when they didn't have uniform, differentiating between the sides or where you were was very, very difficult and confusing. And it was the banner being held that served as that rallying point, that revived their spirits, that gave them hope. If the banner of their side was held high, this was something that gave them hope. And it is the same for us in terms of the battle we face.

[14:06] What gives us hope but the gospel of Jesus Christ? When we struggle with our sin, what is it that gives us hope? Nice words from nice people? Okay, that can be helpful. But it's only the gospel, the cross held high, where we see the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ, no matter how we have fallen. Here is God's forgiveness. Here is God's righteousness. It's not on me.

When we struggle in life, what gives us hope but looking at the cross of Christ? Because here we see the power of God at work in raising Christ from the dead. The same God who raised Christ from the dead is the same God who's at work in our hearts. So as we face the battle, just as they have faced those military battles, it is holding up the banner, holding up the cross of Christ that gives us hope, that encourages us, that serves as our rallying point, that causes us. If we've gone out on a limb on our own, think of the soldier out on a limb, on his own, exposed, beaten. Where is he strongest?

When he comes back under the banner, he comes back under the protection of his king. He comes back under the protection of his lord. He comes back into the presence of the other soldiers that he is with. We come back under the presence of God's people. This is where we're strongest. This is where we're safest. This is where we're protected. This is where we find healing. This is where we find life with God's people under the Word of God, worshiping God in the Word of God and praying to God. This is where we find life and healing and forgiveness and comfort. We hold up that banner, the cross of Christ. That's my first point. My second point is the banner for the nations taken from Isaiah, and I want to highlight those two verses where I translated signal into banner.

And he says, and in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, a root of Jesse, Jesse being the father of David and Christ being the seed of great King David, who shall stand as a banner to the people, for the Gentiles shall seek him and his resting place shall be glorious. And in verse 12, he will set up a banner for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. And what we have now is, and in that whole chapter, we see Christ as a banner for the nations. He's no longer just a banner for Israel. He's no longer just a banner for the church. He's a banner for the nations. This gospel, this cross of Christ, this Savior is a banner for the world, and all the nations will come to that banner.

And it says, you know, in that chapter in Isaiah 11, you have a picture of what happens when the banner of Christ is raised over the nations. We see Him ruling in righteousness. We see Him judging with justice. He's bringing peace where there was hostility, order where there was chaos. And, you know, we can sometimes read Isaiah as if this is something way in the future, okay? And yes, it is yet to be fulfilled in all its fullness. But think of the influence that Christianity and the gospel of Christ has had in this world through history. What happens when Christianity influences a society influences a family, a town, a city, a nation, a continent? What happens?

[17:48] We see justice. We see righteousness. We see peace. We see order. Not flawless. There is still sin. It's still a fallen world. But the nations and the towns and the cities and the families that have been greatly influenced by the cross of Christ as a banner, we see this prophecy being fulfilled in part. In part, in part, of course, it will ultimately be fulfilled at the return of Christ.

Any of the prophecies like that about the nations are only fulfilled partially just now. And it's well-documented, secular historians. I mentioned a historian called Tom Holland this morning who wrote a book called *Dominion*. And in that book, he is, and he's secular. He's not a Christian man, but he recognizes that the influence that the gospel of Christ and the Protestant faith had on the Western world from the 16th century. And he's saying, what changed it? What brought it? Why are these societies so different? Why is there so much good came about in these societies from that age? And he says, it's the gospel. It is the Christian church. He would not necessarily say the proclamation of the gospel. But as a secular historian, he recognizes, objectively speaking, that where Christ reigns, where this banner has held high, that has an influence because Christ is the banner for the nations. We remember Christ is colorblind. The gospel is colorblind. It is nation blind. The gospel of Jesus Christ held high is for all nations, all peoples. And here we find unity and we find some of those prophecies being fulfilled. And I like what, in a slightly different, but taken from David's last words in 2 Samuel 23, and think of this as it applies to Christ and Him now being the banner for the nations and not just being the banner for Israel. He says, when one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, think of Isaiah chapter 11, it says, his delight is in the fear of the Lord. He dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth. Think of that as this applies to Christ. I think it's a lovely picture. Dawning like the morning light, sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, rain making grass to sprout from the earth. You have this beautiful picture of light and life that is brought about by the rule of Christ. Holding up the banner of Christ brings light, brings life. And in the context of Isaiah chapter 11 there, you're seeing Christ as that banner for the nations. And that is the second point. So, we have had Christ as the banner in battle, banner for the nations. And my third point is standing under the banner, and that's from Ephesians chapter 6.

Very, very well-known chapter. Many Christians know it from their early days, the spiritual armor. Our battle is not being against flesh and blood. But Paul is picturing the life here as a battle. And the church now stands under the banner. So, we had Israel as the banner in battle, then the prophecy of Christ. Now Christ has come, and the church is now standing under the banner. And I use the term standing very deliberately because you see what Paul is writing in Ephesians. He mentions the word stand three times in terms of the spiritual battle. The battle for the Christian is to stand, to stand faithful in this gospel, stand faithful for Christ. And if we hold on to Christ, we will stand, and the church stands under that banner as Christ is proclaimed. If we look at the armor of God, there are six pieces to the armor. Every one of them points to Christ. The helmet of salvation, salvation is found only in Christ. The breastplate of righteousness, we have the righteousness of Christ.

[22:13] The belt of truth, Christ is the truth. The shoes of the gospel of peace. The gospel of peace is the gospel of Christ. The shield of faith is faith in Christ, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and Christ is the living Word of God. So, every piece of that armor that Paul points to is pointing us to Christ, pointing us to the banner that is Christ, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And that repeated command is to stand. And isn't that our battle most days? As we go through life, isn't the battle often just to stand, to keep on standing? I've spoken to ministers, including one in here who shall remain nameless, but he's regularly in this pulpit. And I've spoken to others as well, and they have said that at the start of their ministry, they had great ambition.

Younger men, great ambition. But as they went on in the ministry, they said their ambition was simply to remain standing, to remain faithful to the gospel. I've spoken to three or four who have said, very similar things. So, you start off young, enthusiastic, passionate, fantastic. Experience comes, I just want to remain standing. I just want to remain faithful. If I can remain faithful, I will thank God for that. And this is what Paul is saying, stand, stand under the banner as you fight, stand in the power of God. But the key thing for us to remember here is, in terms of the armor of God and standing under the banner, we are fighting from a position of victory.

We are more than conquerors. Christ has already secured the victory. That's why we look to the banner. We keep on fighting. There are skirmishes, if you like, but Christ has defeated sin. Christ has defeated death. Christ has defeated Satan. Christ has overcome the world. And in Christ,

looking to this banner, we too are overcomers. We too are more than conquerors. We are fighting from victory.

Every Christian in here, every man and woman in Christ here is fighting from a position of victory. Tonight, you may not feel like a fighter. You may not feel like a soldier. You may not feel strong. That's okay. It's not your strength. It's not your fighting. Christ has secured that victory for you. Your job is to look to that banner in faith, holding on to Christ and knowing that He has won, and you are more than a conqueror through Him. So, the church stands under the banner.

[25:16] Now, I just want to close with a couple of points and to say, you know, what is it actually...I've alluded to some of it. What does it actually mean to, you know, to stand beneath Christ's banner?

So, we have the banner in battle. We have Christ as a banner for the nations, and the church standing under the banner that is Christ. And I think here's the point. Every one of us in this room and beyond this room looks to some banner or stands under some banner. Now, it may be the banner of success.

To others, it's comfort. To others, it's reputation. To others, it may be politics. It may be self. It may be your physical strength. It may be your intellect. It may be your wealth.

Many, many different banners that people look to. And the question for all of us is, what banner are you standing under today? What banner will you be looking to tomorrow morning as you go out into the workplace, as you interact with the world, as you interact with your friends?

What banner are you standing under? Are you standing under the banner of Jesus Christ? Have you bowed before King Jesus? Do you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? And if you belong to Christ and you're standing beneath his banner, then I want to say to you, you know, never desert your King.

[27:00] Never be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I don't believe that there is any one of us in this room who has not at one point, at the very least, been tempted to be ashamed, even if it's just social acceptance. And we are embarrassed to share that we are Christians, that we are embarrassed to share the gospel of Christ, that we are embarrassed to share that we spent time in prayer and the Word of God, that we are embarrassed that we believe that Christ rose from the dead. I don't believe that not one of us has not been tempted in at least that way to be ashamed of our King. Don't desert Him.

Don't be ashamed of Him. Don't be ashamed of Him. And stand with His people. Don't neglect coming together with the people of God. Like that soldier fighting the battle out on his own, he's more vulnerable, he's more painful. Now, the key thing to remember about that soldier fighting the battle as a Christian on your own, you're no less loved by God. You're no less a Christian. The love of God for you has not changed. But you are making yourself weak and vulnerable and putting yourself in harm's way.

You're making your life, if you like, far more difficult by standing out on a limb on your own. A Christian on their own is a very lonely, vulnerable, difficult, painful place to be. Like the soldier on his own, fighting on his own, apart from the main body of troops, he's far more vulnerable. The injuries are going to be more severe, far more exposed. Same for the Christian. Gather with the people of God, get in the Word of God, get on your knees before prayer, before God in prayer, and hold up that banner.

And if you do belong to Christ and are standing beneath His banner, then you know this, that every trial and every test and every struggle that you face in life, if you are looking to that banner that is Christ, you will remain standing. That does not mean you will not experience pain. It doesn't mean you will not experience loneliness. It doesn't mean you will not experience hurt. But it does mean in looking to Christ, you will remain standing. And there will be times in your life, maybe, you struggle to think, can I continue standing? Well, if you look to Christ, you are in Christ, you will remain standing, though it may not feel like it. And here's the thing, in terms of the banner for the nations, you know, there will come a day and every single empire on this earth, every ruler, every political establishment, every political system, every military standard, every organization, their banners are going to collapse. And the banner of King

Jesus is going to be the banner before which every single knee on this earth will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and they will see that banner, and every other banner will be smashed.

[30:19] Every other banner will be gone. There is only going to be one banner over this world, over this earth, and that is the banner of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Amen.
Amen.