

When All You See Is A Battle

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

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Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

that's known as kind of the wilderness wandering. It's the trials and the testing that Israel goes through. And we've talked about how this is something really relevant for us because all of us have been through trials. All of us have been through a season where we felt like we were in the wilderness of life. In fact, in many ways, you can think about the story of Exodus as an illustration of salvation. In fact, you should think of it that way, that God saves Israel out of Egypt. That's redemption. And now he's taking Egypt out of them. They are learning sanctification.

[2 : 50] They're learning to trust God in the difficult times and seasons of life. And I know that if you're not in one of those tonight, cheer up. It's probably around the corner because such is life.

Amen. And so we've drawn a lot of encouragement from this book as we've been studying our way through. And so we pick up where we left off last week here in Exodus 17 and verse 8. If you are able to stand, would you please do so as we honor the reading of God's word? Exodus chapter 17 and verse 8 says, then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Raphadim. And 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. So Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek. While Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed. And whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. 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. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

And the Lord said to Moses, write this as a memorial in a book and recite it the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sun. And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, the Lord is my banner. Saying, a hand upon the throne of the Lord, the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. This is God's word. Pray with me and for me tonight as we ask God to talk to us. Lord, it's been a great time of worship, singing songs about how you are our salvation, how the battle is ultimately yours, that even in times of trial, it is well with our soul. For we rest in you and you are our victory. Tonight, I don't know what everybody in this room is dealing with. I don't know what they're going through, but I know you do. And I know you know exactly how to speak to every single one of us. Would you do that now by your grace? And I pray it in Jesus' name and God's people said, amen. Amen. You can be seated. It was the most controversial moment in NHL history. It took place back in February the 21st, 2000. The game was between the Boston Bruins and the Vancouver Canucks. I'm not a big hockey guy, but some of you will remember this. One of the Boston players was a man by the name of Marty McSorley. Now he played 17 years in the NHL and was known as kind of a fighter. He was known to play real aggressive. And earlier in the game, he had gone against another player for Vancouver, a man by the name of Donald

Brashear. And they had gotten into a fight earlier in the game and they went kind of back and forth. And Brashear ended up being the clear winner of that fight. Now, after the fight was over, on his way back to the penalty box, Brashear taunted the Bruins bench. Now, needless to say, Marty did not like this very much, nor did the rest of his team. And the whole rest of the game, he was angry. All he wanted to do was get back out on the ice and have another fight with Brashear. But every time he did, Brashear kept avoiding him. Finally, with the game getting close to the end and Boston losing five to two, McSorley knew his time was running out. So with a few seconds left, he skates

over to Brashear and takes his revenge. He skates over to him and he takes his hockey stick and whacks him right in the head. He falls down. He's on the ground for quite some time. He suffers a seizure and a grade three concussion. McSorley was not only ejected from the game, he would be convicted of assault with a weapon and he would never play hockey again. It's considered one of the greatest sucker punches in all of professional sports. Now, question, has that ever happened to you? I don't mean, have you ever been hit upside the head with a hockey stick? Although that's probably happened to a few of you and explains a lot. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm saying, have you ever been sucker punched by life? That hit that comes out of nowhere, that attack that you never saw coming? You were just getting back from the funeral and you received a medical bill you never saw coming. You thought the relationship was fine, then came the conversation you never saw coming. You were just getting back on your feet again and then all of the layoffs you never saw coming. You hadn't felt that good in years.

[8 : 37] Then came the diagnosis that you didn't see coming. You were in such a good mood, you got lost in song and never saw the car that was coming. Every one of us in one way or another has been sucker punched by life. I got robbed by a sweet old lady on a motorized cart. I didn't even see it coming.

All of us knows what that's like. Maybe not that exactly. And have you ever noticed, like, have you ever noticed that when you get sucker punched, it's usually at a time, listen, where it is the last thing in the world you needed? I mean, you'd already been through enough. You were already going through enough. Why now? Listen, sometimes in the wilderness of life, when you can't possibly deal with another trial, another situation, life has a way of sucker punching you out of nowhere. Amen? That's all the amen. I figured to be louder than that. That's all right. That is exactly what happens to Israel here in Exodus chapter 17. Let me set the stage for you. Now, up to this point, there's been a lot of grumbling. There's been a lot of complaining. We have over the last couple of weeks faithfully addressed that in the life of Israel. But let's also be honest, these people have been through a lot.

I mean, if you've been with us and you know the story, they have gone through quite an adventure. They were in slavery for 430 years. In Exodus 5, they're told that they're going to be set free, but life actually gets harder before it ever gets better. Then they have to endure the plagues of Egypt. They fearfully cross the Red Sea while the Egyptians are chasing after them. Now God is purposely taking them the long way around. And while they're in the desert, while they're in this wilderness, they are struggling for food and water and need God to provide it for them every single day. Can we just admit tonight, that's a lot. That's a lot to go through over just a few months of time. Like some of you will remember the story I shared it many years ago about the parakeet named Chippy. Do you remember Chippy? Remember what happened to Chippy? One day his owner decides to clean out his cage with a vacuum cleaner. Don't get ahead of me, right? She goes to answer her cell phone and all of a sudden she hears a slop and Chippy's gone. She opens up the vacuum cleaner, pulls out the bag, and there's the parakeet covered in dirt. She takes the bird to the bathroom, washes him with cold water in the sink.

The bird is shivering cold. Then she turns the hairdryer on him and dries him off. In a matter of few moments, he is sucked into a vacuum cleaner, washed in the sink, dried with a hairdryer. He never saw it coming. A reporter heard about this story and asked his owner a few days later how Chippy was doing. The owner replied, and I quote, Chippy doesn't sing much anymore.

He just sits and stares. Pretty bird. Yeah, can you say pretty bird? Pretty bird. All right, last dumb and dumber clip with an odd, I promise, right? That is, that is a perfect illustration of Israel here in Exodus 17. Are you with me? I mean, they are weak, and they are fragile, and they are tired, and they have been through a lot. They are like Chippy. They have seen all types of things, and they are at a place of weakness when out of nowhere they get sucker punched. Out of nowhere comes a nation called the Amalekites. Look at what happens in verse 8. Amalek came and fought with Israel at Raphadim. Now, I'm going to start tonight. First point is this. I think it's something we can all agree on. Life is a struggle. That's three of you. The rest of you have it really good. Okay, then you really don't need tonight's sermon. Can we just agree tonight that life is hard? That life is a struggle? That life is a battle and a fight? Anybody in a battle right now?

[13 : 18] Anybody in a fight right now? Anybody just kind of need to vent and just shout in the moment? And I'm sure there's some of you here that are, you're a few like Christian platitude type people where you think everything is sugar and spice and everything nice, and every day is to be

filled with candy and rainbows, and you watch Joel Osteen reruns in your free time just to watch him smile.

But I got news for you, sweetheart. That is not life in a fallen world. Amen? In fact, it is not only not life in a fallen world, it's not even biblical. Paul says in Romans 8 very clearly, verse 19, that creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Why? Because creation has been subjected to futility. That is, the world is broken. This is not how it's supposed to be. Notice it on the screen. Because life is broken, that means life is full of battles. Oh my. Oh man, because life is broken. Life is full of all kinds of battles. Now, don't misunderstand me. Life is a gift from God. There is joy in Jesus. We have a hope that is the anchor of our soul. Not denying that. Not denying that at all. That is good Bible. That is biblical truth. But at the same time, you and I live in a world where it is one battle after another. And things come at you out of nowhere and smack you upside the head. I thought about some of the battles that Israel has faced, and I think we can relate to it. Let me give you three. First is inward battles. Inward battles. Up to this point, Israel's battle has not been an external opponent. You might say, well, what about Egypt? Yeah, but have you ever thought about the fact that Israel to this point has not had to fight Egypt? God did all the fighting. At no point has Israel had to take up a sword and fight. Their fight has been mainly internal. That is inward. Theirs is a battle of faith. Like, can I trust God to give me food? Can I trust

God in this trial? Should I go back to Egypt where life seemed better? Like, that's all the inward struggle that they're dealing with. And let's be honest tonight. Notice it on the screen. Oh, man. [15 : 54] Sometimes the hardest battles we face are the battles within our heart and mind. Sometimes those are the biggest struggles we face. In his newest album, Chris Stapleton, which I don't think anybody would be a member of Faith Family and not have that album. If you don't have that album, the application, one of the applications of tonight's sermon, go get the album. All right. In Stapleton's album, he's got a song called Mountain of My Mind. And in it, he talks about how you can get to the point in life where you, quote, want to find a long white line that is a long road. Okay. A long white line, curse the world and leave it all behind. I've been trying all this time, but I still can't climb the mountains of my mind. You with me? You know what that battle is like. How am I going to get through the day? How am I going to endure this? How am I going to trust God in this moment? How am I going to apply the hope I know I have? You know, when I visit people in the hospital and they're going through something physically, as most are in the hospital, I pray as much or more for their emotional strength as I do their physical strength. Because oftentimes the greatest battle is right up here.

Amen? An inward battle. Israel has had to fight that battle. Secondly, an outward battle. Now in Exodus 16, Israel faces a battle externally. They're going to have to take up a sword and fight. They've been walking through the wilderness and all of a sudden in the middle of the desert, a hockey game breaks out. Who knew? Right? It's a fight in the desert. And Israel now has to deal with this enemy. They've been sucker punched by the Amalekites. And if you know anything about the history of the Bible, you know that Israel and the Amalekites have a history. They have not always gotten along. Amalek is the grandson of Esau, the brother of Jacob, two brothers that literally fought from the time they were in the womb. And these people have gone back and forth and at each other. And in this particular instance, the Amalekites take advantage of the weakness of Israel.

Notice what Deuteronomy chapter 25 verse 17 says. Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were, say it with me, faint and weary and cut off your tail. Those who were lagging behind you, he did not fear God. In other words, the Amalekites were like that animal that's like watching for their prey, waiting in the weeds, ready to pounce, taking advantage of someone's weakness. Oh man, has that ever happened to you?

Has that ever been true in your life? That just when you were at your weakest, when you were frail and weary, somebody came at you, somebody kicked you when you were down, you stumbled and it just felt like everybody was piling on top of you one after another. Anybody ever felt like you're at the bottom of that pile? Like enough! They're just coming at me from all directions. That's Israel. That's how they feel. They've got internal battles and outward battles and now unseen battles. We know as believers we're in a spiritual battle. Amen? I mentioned back earlier in the book of Exodus when we were going through the plagues that the plagues were far more than just physical acts of

judgment, that the plagues were actually judgment upon the gods of Egypt. Israel's ultimate battle here is not against flesh and blood, it is against spiritual beings. And the same is true for us. You believe that, right? That's why Peter says this in 1 Peter 5, be sober-minded and be watchful. You have an adversary. And he prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. Listen to me, faith family, look right here. You are not alone in your spiritual battle. Peter is saying, you look at the brotherhood, the family of God around the world, we are all under attack. Life is a battle. It's a struggle. And don't let that discourage you. And here's why. You would do well to take some time and think about all the people of God in the Bible who dealt with battle after battle after battle after battle. I mean, Israel's going to do that as we'll see as we go through the book.

[21 : 07] David, my goodness, David had enemies coming at him all the time. The apostle Paul talks about that there were people always trying to undercut his ministry and undo him. And here's why I say that's actually encouraging. The reason why it's encouraging is this. Having lots of battles is not a sign of lacking God's love. Having a lot of battles is not a sign that you lack God's love. It just means you're alive in a broken world that is one thing after another. But there's another reason why you should not be discouraged tonight. And it's found in verse 13. Look at verse 13 in chapter 17.

Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, write this as a memorial in a book and recite it to the ears of Joshua, that I may utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under the sun. Moses built an altar and he called the name of it. Everybody say it with me. The Lord is my banner. So what you see here is not only that life is a battle, what you find here is that the Lord is a shelter. Upon Israel's victory over the Amalekites, Moses builds an altar, the very common thing in the Old Testament, and he calls this altar, Yahweh is my banner. Now what does that mean? Like we think of banner, we kind of think of like a flag or something. But a banner is a military term. It's a rallying point for troops in battle. It's where they come underneath something, like a shelter. The idea here that Yahweh is my banner is the idea that Israel finds victory underneath the banner of Yahweh. That their victory, their shelter, it's why we've been singing what we've been singing tonight. The Lord is our salvation, that He's our victory, that the battle belongs to Him. Because in our battles, listen to me, whether they are inward, whether they are outward, or whether they are unseen, the shelter we find victory in is our God. That's what Israel discovers here. And who is that shelter?

Who is that banner? Only the God of all creation. That's pretty awesome to think about. That the one you get to take shelter under in the midst of your battles is the God who created it all. Luther, this is almost as good as a Stapleton song. I'm just kidding. This is a hymn, a mighty fortress is our God. And I've quoted this many times. You know it's probably my favorite hymn or one of them. Luther writes in this, as he was going through his own battles for his very life, for the essence of the gospel, writes, and though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for Him. His rage we can endure, for lo, His doom is sure. One little word, shall fail Him. That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth. The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth. Let good and kindreds go. This mortal life also, the body they may kill. God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever.

ever. Luther found in his own battle the banner of Yahweh, the banner of God. A friend of mine this week sent me an article about a pastor in Nigeria who several months ago, evidently this pastor declared himself the winner of the International Spiritual Wrestling Championship. There he is with his title belt and all. I didn't know that was a thing. But anyways, I guess you can be the International Spiritual Wrestling Champion. So what happened, according to this pastor, is he was invited to go fight Satan in hell. And he went to hell, and he fought Satan by himself, and he returned the undisputed international spiritual wrestling champion of the world. I don't know if this good pastor realizes or not, but he's about 2,000 years too late. All right? There is already one who has defeated the enemy, who is the victory, who has conquered death, who has conquered the grave, and he is our victory and banner. Paul says in Romans 8, hey, what can they say to these things? If God's for us, who can be against us? Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness, danger or sword? No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And I am sure that neither death

nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present or things to come or powers or height or depth or anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is reason to be encouraged tonight in your struggle, in your battle, and that is, as we see in Exodus 17, the Lord is our banner. He is the one that gives us victory. But that is not the only source. That's the ultimate source of strength and encouragement in our battle. But it's not the only one. Look at what happens in verse 10.

[27 : 13] Oh, this is such a beautiful picture. Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek. And Moses and Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. When Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed.

And whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary. So they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. And there was Aaron and Hur that lifted 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.

And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword. Listen, life is a struggle. Amen. The Lord is our shelter. And we also need support. We need support. I mean, is this not a beautiful picture? I know this is a story some of you have probably heard before, but I just was struck by the picture of this. Like, I want you to imagine here Moses lifting up the staff of God. And he's tired. He's weary. His arms are shaking. It's starting to lower and Israel is losing in battle. And along comes Aaron and Hur. And they hold up his arm. Faith family, listen, those two men, these two guys play no small role in the outcome of this battle. And I don't know, there's a lot of beautiful pictures, but I don't know of a more beautiful picture of what the church is supposed to be. Amen? Like Moses, you and I grow weak. Our hands grow weary. Some of you tonight have been blindsided and sucker punched by the Amalekites. Only they're not called the Amalekites, they're called cancer, financial hardship, depression, discouragement. And do you know what we need to do? Lift each other up.

[29 : 30] To come alongside and hold someone else's weary, tired hand. To be a presence in their life, to keep their arms raised. Listen, faith family, the church was designed to be by God a place where two things happen. Are you ready? Are you listening? Oh man, if they're, I mean, outside of gospel centrality, this is the most important thing I think I want in the culture of our church, these two things, okay?

Number one, it's a place where you can come and admit you're weak. You can come like Moses and say, I can't, I can't do this anymore. I can't, I can't hold this up any longer. I am tired. We are not a church that God has called us to be until you have the freedom to walk inside this place and say, I can't do it anymore. And I'm not going to act like I can. I'm weak and I'm tired. But secondly, that not only will you admit your struggle, but you will find support. And that this would be a faith family that would come alongside you and care for you and lift you up and pray for you. Now I'm going to give a shout out to our prayer and care ministry. I think they do a phenomenal job. If you're not familiar with our prayer and care ministry, listen, if you ever need a prayer, all you got to do is let us know how to pray. And we've got a team of warriors ready to spring into action. Amen. And man, do they. And not only will they pray, they will care. And of course, listen, listen, listen, no church is perfect in this area because we are not perfect outside of the perfection of Jesus Christ. Amen. I'm not saying we're flawless. I'm not saying we always get it right, but I'm saying this church really cares. It really cares when you're weak. It really cares when you're tired. Maybe it's in a small group that they're in your small group, whether it's a men's group or a women's group or a co-ed group, that in that group, you find people that will come alongside you and say,

I'm not going to let you lower your hand. I'm going to be here to support you and love you through this. Amen. Life is a struggle. God is our shelter. And we need the support of one another to continue our journey in the wilderness. Some of you may have heard the name Dawson Trotman. He was the founder. If you've not heard his name, you've likely heard the Christian organization he founded, which is called the Navigators. Billy Graham actually spoke at his funeral. And Billy Graham said this at his funeral, quote, I think he personally touched more lives than anybody I've ever known. That's a lot coming from Billy Graham. Well, Trotman died in a water skiing accident in New York. It was at the end of the day and he was completely exhausted and tired from being out on the water all day. And he got into a boat and he was seated by a woman and he turned to the woman and he said, are you able to swim? And she said, no, I can't swim. So he switched seats with her so that she could be in a safer location. And sure enough, as the boat was heading down

the water, it hit a wave and the two of them fell overboard. Dawson swam to the woman, held her above the water with what little bit of strength he had left until the boat came back and rescued her. As they grabbed a hold of the woman and pulled her in, they reached for Dawson and he sank out of reach. Dawson drowned that day.

And when Time Magazine did an article about his life, the title of the article was simply this, always holding someone up. That'll define a life. Are you the kind of person that can be known as the type that's always holding someone up? I got you. I'm not going to let go of you. You're not going to give up. Today, Faith Family, if you are in a battle, if you are in a struggle, know that the Lord is your shelter and know that there is a church here to support you and encourage you in your moment of weakness. And finally, today, where should we turn for our ultimate victory? Where do we look to know?

[34 : 26] We really are going to be okay. We really are going to make it through. There really is victory in this battle. It's the same place that Israel found victory in Exodus 17. Let me show you to you when we're done. Verse 9. Moses said to Joshua, choose for us men and go out and fight Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. And so Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Now there's been a lot of debate about what Moses is actually doing here. In fact, I hope I don't upset some of you. It's certainly not my intent to do this. I think I'm being faithful to the text, but you can be the judge of that. I have heard many and many and many and many and many of sermons on this text about prayer, that what Moses was doing and Aaron and Hur was prayer. They were praying for the battle. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I am all for prayer. I believe in the power of prayer, but prayer is not mentioned here at all. Nowhere in the text. In fact, it's not even a consistent theme in the book of

Exodus. It certainly is elsewhere in the Bible, but it's not here. And there's a reason for that. Listen, victory in Exodus 17, again, don't please hear what I'm saying or what I'm not saying.

Victory here is not found in prayer. It's found in a staff that was raised on a hill. And that, dear friend, is foreshadowing where our victory is ultimately found. It is foreshadowing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because John 3 says that just as Moses lifted up the staff, in another case, the serpent in the wilderness, look at here in John 3 verse 14, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. In other words, faith family, if you want to be confident of victory, know this, that what happened with three men on a hill in the wilderness was a picture of what was going to happen with three men on a hill outside Jerusalem. And that is what won the victory for you. That is why tonight, no matter inward, outward, unseen, whatever battle you're going through, victory has been assured for the child of God. And I know there are times when life is going to come along and it's going to sucker punch you upside the head. Do not be discouraged. Do not live defeated. Because not only are there people here that will gladly lift up your hands, there is a hillside where the Son of God was lifted up.

And he declares to you today, right now, tonight, no matter what you're going through, the Lord is your banner. And all God's people said, amen. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for just the honesty of the text that we get to see the people of God going through their battles, going through their struggles. And it really is meant to be an encouragement for us because I think sometimes we think we're alone in our struggle and the battles that we face. And just when we turn the corner, boom, there's something there to smack us upside the head. God, your people have always gone through battles because the world is broken. But you so loved the world you gave your only Son that whoever would look to that staff that was lifted up on that hill that day, whoever would look to you by faith would have eternal life, the ultimate and assured victory of our life. I pray tonight, if there is anybody here that is going through a battle, whether they are struggling internally, externally, they're in a spiritual battle right now, that we would take these next few moments as we come to the cross through communion, and that we would rest in the victory of Jesus. And I pray it in his name. Amen. Amen.