

I Am: Part 7

The LORD is the Banner / The LORD is the Standard

Pastor James Bell

John 8:58 NLT

58 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!"

If we could begin this morning with what is a Banner or a Standard is or symbolizes. In biblical times, a banner was a standard or ensign used for various purposes, often serving as a symbol of identity and allegiance. A standard or banner in ancient warfare served as the rallying point—soldiers kept their eyes fixed on it to maintain formation, direction, and unity. The Banner or Standard is precisely what it's name is. It identifies us individually and corporately. It's appearance sits above us and we lift our heads up and fix our eyes upon it. It is the constant reminder of who we are and whose we are.

Exodus 17:8–9 NLT

8 While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim, the warriors of Amalek attacked them. 9 Moses commanded Joshua, "Choose some men to go out and fight the army of Amalek for us. Tomorrow, I will stand at the top of the hill, holding the staff of God in my hand."

Rephidim was the place where God told Moses to strike the rock with his staff and that water would come gushing out. And upon his obedience and after the people had drunk their share of water, Moses named the place Massah which means test and Meribah which means arguing because they had tested the LORD and argued with Moses. But now the Israelites would be tested. God had been faithful to supply water for them and their livestock.

Moses symbolized the voice of God and the word came to Joshua and said choose. This is a representation that we have to make a conscience decision. This is what we know as free-will. It is our decision. Not the decision of others but our own. We have to have a made up mind.

So Joshua had to make up his own mind and choose but choose what? Men to help him fight! Joshua didn't have to fight this battle alone. He had to surround himself with like minded people.

As we begin to think about the very fact that they had come out of captivity so they had not combat training, which means that victory was not the basis of their skill set. And there is no mention of modern weaponry. They had to fight for their lives with what they had. And verse 9 shows us this.

Exodus 17:10–13 NLT

10 So Joshua did what Moses had commanded and fought the army of Amalek. Meanwhile, Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of a nearby hill. 11 As long as Moses held up the staff in his hand, the Israelites had the advantage. But whenever he dropped his hand, the Amalekites gained the advantage. 12 Moses' arms soon became so tired he could no longer hold them up. So Aaron and Hur found a stone for him to sit on. Then they stood on each side of Moses, holding up his hands. So his hands held steady until sunset. 13 As a result, Joshua overwhelmed the army of Amalek in battle.

Joshua obeyed the word spoken. He fought and in return Moses raised the banner unto God. His staff was only a piece of wood in the eyes of men but because it was unto God, it was so much more. We are talking about the same staff that turned into a snake, turn the Nile into blood, and cause water to come from a rock. Let's recall back to Exodus 4:1-3

Exodus 4:1–3 NLT

1 But Moses protested again, "What if they won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say, 'The LORD never appeared to you?'" 2 Then the LORD asked him, "What is that in your hand?" "A shepherd's staff," Moses replied. 3 "Throw it down on the ground," the LORD told him. So Moses threw down the staff, and it turned into a snake! Moses jumped back.

The question of what is in your hand... What has God placed at your disposal? The staff was only a tool used by God to validate Moses' mission. God has placed something at your disposal and it is a tool to aid you in the mission that God has called you to. God knew what was in Moses' hand...he questioned Moses to turn his heart towards him.

As long as Moses had the staff raised then Joshua was winning but when Moses lowered his staff then Joshua begin to lose. A few key things we need to highlight here. Joshua and his comrades doing battle was not a guarantee victory. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Addiction Recovery Programs, Peer-Based Programs, 12-Step programs are not enough to bring victory. It is raising the standard in our battles that brings victory. Our victory is not our overcoming but allowing God to overcome us. He is the standard of certain victory.

Just as Joshua had to choose men to fight with him, Moses had men to aid him. Moses had a relationship like no one else on the face of the earth but he still needed people to support him. God never wants us to do it alone. Victory is earned in through physical participation and spiritual participation.

Something else we must notice...the battle wage into the darkness of the day. Victory came at the breaking of light. Our battles seem to be the hardest in the darkest of time but the continuation of obedience physically and spiritually gave way to victory.

Exodus 17:14–16 NLT

14 After the victory, the LORD instructed Moses, “Write this down on a scroll as a permanent reminder, and read it aloud to Joshua: I will erase the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” 15 Moses built an altar there and named it Yahweh-nissi (which means “the LORD is my banner”). 16 He said, “They have raised their fist against the LORD’s throne, so now the LORD will be at war with Amalek generation after generation.”

Victory was certain because of complete obedience and not only did God give the victory but He gave a promise to wipe out the Amalekites. Moses built an altar and named it Yahweh Nissi. God had set the standard for this battle and every battle to come. Yahweh Nissi - The standard was the choice to obey physically and spiritual until the enemy was crushed. Although this would not be the last time they saw the Amalekites they had to remember where victory came from.

Numbers 14:39–45 NLT

39 When Moses reported the LORD’s words to all the Israelites, the people were filled with grief. 40 Then they got up early the next morning and went to the top of the range of hills. “Let’s go,” they said. “We realize that we have sinned, but now we are ready to enter the land the LORD has promised us.” 41 But Moses said, “Why are you now disobeying the LORD’s orders to return to the wilderness? It won’t work. 42 Do not go up into the land now. You will only be crushed by your enemies because the LORD is not with you. 43 When you face the Amalekites and Canaanites in battle, you will be slaughtered. The LORD will abandon you because you have abandoned the LORD.” 44 But the people defiantly pushed ahead toward the hill country, even though neither Moses nor the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant left the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in those hills came down and attacked them and chased them back as far as Hormah.

Because they disobeyed, God told them not to enter the land of the Amalekites and Canaanites and to return in the direction of the Red Sea. This is not what they wanted to hear. They all of a sudden had a moment of awakening. The Israelites were not truly repenting. Their remorse is because they didn’t get what they wanted, not because they disobeyed God. This seems to be a common theme that many experience. We can understand this with some urban lingo:

The Bait-and-Switch: represents a false, perfect version of oneself in the attempted to secure the relationship or situation and then reverts back to who they were prior.

Prison Salvation: It describes the phenomenon of prisoners turning to the Bible or religion to cope with their sentence, seek early parole, or gain protection, only to abandon their faith immediately upon being released back into society.

This perfectly describes the remorse that the Israelites had. The same message that Paul spoke to the people of Corinth

2 Corinthians 7:10 NLT

10 For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.

This is more than an apology. It is a change of character and ways that turns our heart towards God. And the Israelites had a sorrow but it was too late because the word of God had already been given to avoid the land of the Amalekites and Canaanites and return towards the Red Sea. The standard of God - Yahweh Nissi had already been positioned away from the promise land. But because they ignored the standard they suffered loss and defeat.

If they had truly repented then they would follow the word of God even when it was not favorable to them. Obedience is rewarding but sin is still punishable. Obedience does not remove the seed that is sown by disobedience. When we rebel against God's word then there are consequences. We will find that in the midst of consequences from disobedience are bearable if we walk out what doesn't feel good to our flesh. The Israelites were already facing punishment because of their disobedience. They didn't have to suffer even more loss. But it was their choosing, just like it was Joshua's choosing.

But the Amalekites don't end here.

1 Samuel 15:1-7 NLT

1 One day Samuel said to Saul, "It was the LORD who told me to anoint you as king of his people, Israel. Now listen to this message from the LORD! 2 This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies has declared: I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. 3 Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys." 4 So Saul mobilized his army at Telaim. There were 200,000 soldiers from Israel and 10,000 men from Judah. 5 Then Saul and his army went to a town of the Amalekites and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Saul sent this warning to the Kenites: "Move away from where the Amalekites live, or you will die with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up from Egypt." So the Kenites packed up and left. 7 Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt.

Samuel was a Prophet of God and he represented the voice and word of God. And the word of the LORD reminded King Saul that it was Him that had anointed him as king. It is by God's authority that he was anointed and appointed. God was ready to settle the account with the Amalekites. Remember the promise God gave to Joshua that He would wipe them off the face of the earth? Joshua didn't see this come to pass but God's word remain faithful. And God desires us to do his bidding. His plan is worked through people that obey. But just as Joshua chose to obey the words of Moses, Saul had to choose to obey the word of Samuel from God. God has a redemptive plan and we may not see it fulfilled in our lifetime but His word holds true. And now was the time for the fulfillment but God's plan still had to be executed through willing vessels.

1 Samuel 15:8–12 NLT

8 He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. 9 Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality. 10 Then the LORD said to Samuel, 11 "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the LORD all night. 12 Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, "Saul went to the town of Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal."

King Saul was doing handling business for the LORD, then...He caught up to the root of the problem. So instead of killing the source, he made it his trophy. After the capture of the Amalekite then they destroyed only what was worthless and poor of quality. Listen to how Paul addressed this with the Galatians.

Galatians 5:7–9 GNB

7 You were doing so well! Who made you stop obeying the truth? How did he persuade you? 8 It was not done by God, who calls you. 9 "It takes only a little yeast to make the whole batch of dough rise," as they say.

A little compromise made way to neglect Yahweh Nissi. God had set a standard for them and because King Saul disobeyed he set the standard for the rest of his army. His compromise voided the banner of God. And this is why God said to Samuel that he regretted he had ever made Saul king. We need to understand the sovereignty of God being sorry for something He did. This is not a relenting or a wishing that Saul was ever born but it describes the emotional sorrow that God has because his judgment must now be displayed instead of His love. God's word is final and when we compromise Yahweh Nissi - The Standard of God, we will eventually witness the holiness of God in a facet of judgement.

In Closing:

1 Samuel 15:19–26 NLT

19 Why haven't you obeyed the LORD? Why did you rush for the plunder and do what was evil in the LORD's sight?" 20 "But I did obey the LORD," Saul insisted. "I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. 21 Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and plunder to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." 22 But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. 23 Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the LORD, he has rejected you as king." 24 Then Saul admitted to Samuel, "Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the LORD's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded. 25 But now, please forgive my sin and come back with me so that I may worship the LORD." 26 But Samuel replied, "I will not go back with you! Since you have rejected the LORD's command, he has rejected you as king of Israel."

Why didn't you obey? What stops us from obeying? Saul said that he carried out the mission that he was sent to do. Saul was deceived. But it gets a little deeper than that. He was self-deceived. This is when you think you are right but in reality you are wrong. He thought he was in good standings with God but when the word reminded him that he was to destroy it all, the word itself is the reflection of reality. Saul's desire for plunder and a king trophy was his compromise.

God is looking for complete obedience not a compromise of obedience. Incomplete or partial obedience is still disobedience. Do we have areas in our live that we are walking in partial or delayed obedience?

Saul repented but he repented to Samuel and not God. Yahweh Nissi has set the standard and we are to abide and live in compliance if we are to fulfill God's plan for our lives and others.

Let me pray with you today!