

How God helps others through our prayers

January 18, 2009 - Exodus 17:8-16

Do you ever have mornings where your day barely begins and you're already in a battle? The kids are fighting. The alarm didn't go off. Or the car won't start. Or maybe you've had a fine morning at home. But when you arrive at work there is a battle waiting for you in your inbox, or a person comes to see you first thing with a problem. Maybe you get into school and something happens that throws your day into turmoil.

We encounter battles in a variety of ways and at various times in life. One author talks about the battle that went on in his mind regarding his wife. He was driving her to their son's last soccer game of the season. They enjoyed some conversation about dreams they had for the future. But after several minutes, they realized they were caught in a traffic jam. Precious moments slipped by as tension mounted in the car.

In an effort to be helpful, his wife committed the unpardonable sin. She suggested an alternate route. "If you take a right here and go up First Street, we can cut over and take about five minutes off the drive. The author writes, "I was ready to divorce her. I'm serious. In

about 20 seconds I was ready for separation. If the judge had been in the car, I'd have signed my papers right there. Good grief – over a comment about my driving? Is that all that was going on at that moment?"

I sat at the wheel silent and steaming. On the outside, I looked cool; inside, I thought "*Doesn't she think I know how to get there? I hate it when she does that.*" Then another voice says, "*She always does that.*" And I say (internally) *Yeah, she does. . . she's always saying stuff like that. I hate that..*" A feeling of accusation and anger and self-righteousness sweeps over me. Then the voice says, *this is never going to change*, and I say, *This is never going to change.* And the voice says, "*You know John, there are a lot of women out there who would be deeply grateful to have you as their man.*" And I think, *Yeah – there are a lot of women out there.*" You get the picture. Change the characters and the setting and the very same thing happens to you.

Then he writes, "The devil no doubt has a place in our theology, but is he a category we even think about in the daily events of our lives? Has it ever crossed your mind that not every thought that crosses your mind comes from you? What I experienced in the midst

of traffic that day happens all the time in marriages, in ministries, in any relationship.¹ It happens between kids and parents, siblings, extended families, and church families. When it happens, we face a battle as to whether or not we will agree with those satanic thoughts.

Young people, you face an intense battle if you want to walk with God. Your culture tells you it you're the most talented; or the smartest or prettiest or strongest you are worthwhile. It tells you that what you look like is more important than who you are. You should live together before marriage to find out if you're compatible. You are in a battle to figure out whether that is true.

Newlyweds face the battle of figuring out how to live together. New parents struggle through the inevitable disagreements that arise while learning how to parent. Mid-life married couples face a battle against discontent. Some elderly marriages face a battle against allowing bitterness to creep in.

Men, we face a battle against the world's confused definition of a man. From one side, we are told good looks, money and lots of conquests mark a true man. On the other hand, the world tells men

and women to minimize our differences – to adopt feminine characteristics and sensitivities. God calls us to not only be strong physically, but also in character, leading and warring for His causes and our families. We face a battle if we wish to strive to live God's way.

Women, the world proclaims "you need a certain waistline or weight; a certain look and clothes to make it as a woman." You can buy that message. But the Bible tells us that a Godly women's inner beauty is more important than her outer beauty. You will face a battle to believe that this is true in today's world.

Families constantly face the battle of over commitment. Professionals face a battle against the world's values in your workplace. Parents face the battle to give in to the easy way out when it comes to parenting. Will we let TV raise our kids or saturate their minds with God's word? Sick Christians battle illnesses and wonder how this all fits into God's plans?

And some of the biggest battles we face are with the ones we love most and the people we live with. All of us have satanic thoughts

¹ John Eldredge, "Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul, Nelson:

Nashville, 2001, p. 151-152.

that come into our minds like those that came into the mind of that husband in the car.

We might not be facing a battle right now. But we all travel through hostile times in our lives. Some of us are very aware of the battles we face. Some may even think they are losing the battle or wonder where God is in it. When we must go through a hostile time in life, must we go through it alone?

Well the good news God brings to us today through His Word is this: **Because the Lord's preserves His people in hostile times, we can go through them and help others through in His strength.**

To preserve means to “protect, conserve, safeguard, defend, sustain, carry on and care for.” God proved throughout Biblical history His passion to preserve His people. Today we're going to see one example of how He did that and how He involved people in His preserving action.

This comes in our continuing series on “Looking out in prayer and ministry.” We looked **in** at internal issues with prayer. We looked **up** to the **One** we pray to. We now look **out** in prayer and ministry to others. But when you look into this world and in people's

lives, it can be pretty overwhelming. People face complex problems, desperate situations, fractured families and job losses. Some walk through the devastating consequences of their own sin or the sin of another. If we plunge in and try to “save the world” on our own, we will soon be overwhelmed by our own limitations. But with the Lord and His preserving work, we can call in **One** who can make a substantial, profound and eternal difference in the lives of people around us. One way we call the Lord in to other's lives is through intercessory prayer. Through this prayer **for** others, the Lord's power and blessing flows through our prayers into the lives of those around us. So today we want to look at How God preserved His people in a hostile situation.

Second we will consider how we can respond to this truth so we can go through hostile times and help others through them. By the end of our time I pray you will know you are not alone in hostile times, and you can offer others the hope that they're not alone.

Our text today is Exodus 17:8-16.

Exodus 17:8-16 (NIV)

⁸ The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. ⁹ Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

¹⁰ So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. ¹¹ As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. ¹² When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset. ¹³ So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

¹⁵ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. ¹⁶ He said, "For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation."

The book of Exodus reveals God's saving work to release Israel from slavery to form them into His people. God forced Israel's release from slavery through the ten mighty acts or plagues. The final act was the most terrible. God sent the death angel to kill all first born in the land. But He protected the Israelite firstborn through the blood of the lambs that were painted on their doorposts. Then God preserved His people by providing a way through the Red Sea when they were hemmed in by the Egyptian army. Then the nation went into the hostile wilderness or desert. There God provided water sweetened by a piece of wood, quail from the sky for meat, bread every morning on

the ground (called manna), rest in the Sabbath and water from a rock at a place called Rephidim. This new oasis forms the setting for this account.

How does the Lord preserve His people in hostile times?

Way #1) He sends His power through the prayers of His people for others. (17:8-13)

In verse 8, trouble develops. The nation of Amalek comes to fight Israel. These Amalekites were a wandering tribe based in southern Palestine. They descended from Esau who was Jacob's brother. God changed Jacob's name to Israel and he became father of 12 sons. They became 12 tribes of Israel. So the Amalekites are distant relatives of the Israelites. But Esau hated Jacob. Esau's descendants hated Jacob's descendants.

These Amalekites dealt viciously within anyone they encountered. In fact, in Deuteronomy 25:17-18, we're told they followed the Israelites as they travelled through the wilderness. Then they would attack stragglers and the weak, likely killing them and stealing from them. This was a battle hardened tribe that knew how to fight.

Israel had never fought a battle. Moses' request in verse 9 reveals this. "So Moses said to Joshua, "choose for us men and go out and fight Amalek." Not, "get the army together. Not sound the mobilization trumpets." "Choose some men Joshua. You probably have identified those who might have skills in this area. Get them together because we're going to fight tomorrow."

Surely Moses will fight with them. The leader has to be right there in the midst of the army to make a difference. But in the second half of verse 9 Moses states, "Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands." Maybe this was encouraging news. It was through God's staff that the plagues came upon Egypt. Maybe they would just assemble as an army and then watch God zap the Amalekites dead.

Joshua, to his credit, immediately obeys. Verse 10 tells us he went out to fight the Amalekites with his men. Moses goes up the hill with two friends; one is Aaron his brother who spoke in Egypt and stood by Moses' side. The other is named Hur who is actually a him whom we think was Moses' brother-in-law.

Then comes verse 11. Any thoughts Israel had of simply watching God destroy Amalek soon fade away. This was going to be a difficult fight. Whenever Moses' raised his hands up perhaps with staff in them, Israel prevailed. But when his hands collapsed in exhaustion, the Amalekites would start winning. So Aaron and Hur, find a rock and sit Moses down. Then they hold up his hands for hours until sunset. Finally, Joshua and his men win the victory.

Now what happened here? God chose to send His power and fighting ability into the Israelites only when Moses' hands were raised up. So Moses' hands were not just a symbol of power but a conductor of power. And they had to be raised up for this power to flow.

It is true that this account does not mention the word prayer. But Jewish and Christian commentators throughout the centuries have interpreted "lifting up hands" as a posture of prayer. So they argue that not only did God's power flow through the staff and Moses' hands, it flowed because of Moses' prayers. I also take this position. I cannot imagine Moses watch his people struggle desperately and not pray. Moses was a man of intense prayer. So as he raised his hands, I too see Moses prayers going up and God's power flowing down.

But why did God choose to do it this way? Why not zot the Amalekites through the rod? I mean think about the picture this text paints. Instead of standing on the hill with his hands raised up in a posture of victory, Moses has to sit down and have others hold his hands up. He sits on a rock they moved to him, so it can't be a very big rock. That's more like a posture of weakness. It was much less impressive.

And perhaps that's exactly what God wanted. How better to show that the strength to win this victory came not from Moses but from Him? I think God was teaching Israel a significant theological lesson through this incident. I don't think it was any accident that Moses was in a prominent easy to see place. I don't think it was an accident that God did not empower them to win the battle in 5 minutes. I believe He wanted to show the Israelites what it was like to fight with Him and what it was like to fight alone. The Lord taught Israel that they needed Him in battle.

The Lord also taught them that they needed each other. Joshua could not win the battle alone. Moses could not hold his arms up

alone. God chose to work through the hands and prayers of Moses to preserve His people.

God does the same today. When God's people pray for others, God can work through those prayers. We've seen that as Laura Cooper's niece Serena Schmidt recently came off our prayer list after over a year of prayer. She, her husband and boys have walked through the hostile territory of a brain tumor. We saw this last weekend when we prayed for Nancy Moore's 5 year old niece Kate struggling with leukemia.

Nancy writes: Just a further Kate update. Thank you Tom for your prayer from the pulpit Sunday. The Saturday had been truly horrendous for Kate. They poked her 19 times in an attempt to get the central line to work. They finally stopped when Dad screamed and told them "enough was enough." She has been quite traumatized by the events.

Then Sunday you prayed and my sister's church actually interrupted the planned service and had about 10 people pray publicly for Kate that morning of the surgery. And the answer was such good news that her line was okay and not infected as they had suspected.

She has steadily improved; no fever, and some immunity, ever since that rally of prayer. It has been a long physical and emotional 10 days for all

involved, but they can truly see God's intervention and mercy for them on that Sunday.

If we want to look out to others as salt & light, God provides prayer as a means to help them. What Moses, Aaron and Hur did on that day is the work all of us are called upon to take on. One Christian author writes, “We are not all asked to be public leaders, but all of us are to engage in Intercessory Prayer.” “If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving others.

It is also one way God preserves His people in hostile times. He sends His power through the prayers of His people into other's lives. But there's another way He preserves that this text reveals.

Way #2 – He personally intervenes to preserve His people. (17:14-17)

Verses 14-17 contain the commemoration of the victory. First, God instructs Moses to record this event for future generations. Joshua needed to know about this recording so that he and Israel remember that The Lord God fought against the Amalekites. But the writing would not only remember this victory. It would contain the

Lord's oath to blot out the memory of Amalek. God would personally wage war against this tribe. They consistently opposed God's people. They fought Israel whenever they had opportunity. But when those times came, Joshua and Israel would remember the Lord's promise to wage war against their enemies.

Moses further commemorates this first victory by building an altar to the Lord. He calls it “The Lord is my Banner.” Now a banner or standard was a rallying point for an army during a battle. In the ancient world, they sometimes put images or signs of the gods on a spear or rod. The army could rally around that image to gain courage. God's staff in Moses' hands was the banner for this battle. But notice what or who Moses designates as Israel's banner in verse 15. He doesn't say “the Lord's staff is my banner.” He says “The Lord is my banner. He is my rallying point.” This would remind the nation in future years that they did not need to depend on Moses' staff for victory. They could depend on the Lord Himself through sacrifice and prayer. Israel could confidently enter hostile lands and times because the Lord Himself was their banner. The Lord would personally intervene especially with these Amalekites. In fact, look at how the

passage concludes. “The Lord will be at war with the Amalekites from generation to generation.” So the passage began with the Amalekites waging war on God’s people. It ends with God waging war against the Amalekites. The Israelites would not have to fight them alone.

Israel could engage in this war against its mortal enemy because the Lord poured out His power through Moses’ prayers. He also would step in to fight alongside them. You and I can engage in and overcome the battles we have to face because others pray and the Lord fights alongside of us during the battle.

Friends, sometimes He fights battles on our behalf without our knowledge. We might discover that He has been at work behind the scenes on a worrying situation. We arrive at the meeting and discover the issue has already been resolved. I am amazed at how God sometimes assists me in a week that looks impossible. I have seen the Lord clear my schedule or resolve an issue far better than I could ever have done it. I believe that is the Lord battling on our behalf behind the scenes all the time.

We may have a special passion for a particular problem in the world. Maybe we are concerned about world hunger. Maybe God has placed on our heart the HIV crisis in Africa. It is estimated that every day 8000 people die of AIDS in this world. 13,700 more are infected very day. That’s a huge battle. We may be concerned about crushing social problems in our society. What about institutional corruption and greed that pervades the business world? Certainly, we are called to do our part. We must fight our part in the battles against these evils. But we can also rest assured that we can entrust the bigger battles to Him. He is at His work fighting on behalf of His people in these great battles.

Most importantly, He wages war against the rulers, authorities and powers of the dark world. He and his angelic armies battle the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We will never know until eternity all the battles that He fought on our behalf without our knowledge. Yet He battles and is devoted to not only wage war but blot out the name and memory of the evil one.

God demonstrated His commitment to this when He sent His Son into the thickest part of the fight. Jesus entered into the greatest

battle in history. He waged war against man's 3 mortal enemies; Satan, death and sin. Yet at the cross, Jesus defeated them all. Isn't it interesting that before He went and fought that mother of all battles, He first went to the garden to raise His arms up to the Father to receive from Him the strength He would need. The Father sent angels to attend to Him. Then Jesus rose up and faced his arrestors to go to the cross to win that victory.

Because He won the victory over our mortal enemies, Christians can have victory over the same 3 areas. We just have to learn how to live out those victories in our lives. For the Israelites, that meant getting the skilled warriors together to go out and fight, getting a stone for Moses to sit on, and Aaron and Hur to prop up his hands.

How can we go through hostile times and help others go through them?

- 1) *Engage in the battles along your life's path while calling others to intercede for you.* There are times *we need* to fight the battles. We're going through a hostile environment. But we must not try to fight them alone. The Lord is willing to fight

alongside of us if we will depend on Him for strength. We need to depend on others to lift up hands for us. We need to put aside our pride and ask others to help us in prayer

- 2) *Lift up your hands to the Lord in prayer for others.* Engage in intercessory prayer. One of the greatest gifts you can offer someone else is your prayer to God on their behalf. Some of us get over-committed in the amount of prayer we promise. So we have to trust God's promptings with who we pray for and when. But if we find it difficult to get much enthusiasm to pray for others, we can start by praying for an increase in love for others. As God grows our capacity to care, we will naturally want to pray for neighbors, friends and even enemies.
- 3) *Support other intercessors.* Just like Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms, we can support those engaged in a long prayer struggle for someone else. Remember those who have unsaved loved ones – unsaved parents, spouses or children. Remember parents praying for their young adult children who have wandered from the faith. Oh, those parents pray. But it's so encouraging to them when others hold them up in prayer.

4) *Recognize before the Lord can preserve you, He must deliver you.* Before Israel ever made it into the wilderness, they had to be released from the oppressive slavery. God delivered them through His 10 mighty acts. Then He preserved them through their journey by providing water and protection. In the same way, all of us need to be delivered from our enslavement to sin.

The Bible describes those who don't know Christ this way.

“Dead in trespasses and sins; following the ways of the word and the prince of the power of the air (the devil). Gratifying the cravings of the sinful nature; following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature children of wrath.

If you don't know Christ, you need deliverance from sin slavery.

Then God enters into His preserving work through the hostile environments you have to travel through. Coming to Christ does not mean all your problems will get solved. In fact, you will face new challenges in walking God's way. But you will be freed from the slavery of sin. You will have the eternal God as your refuge. You will enjoy His preserving work as you walk through life's hostile environments. But it starts by trusting Jesus Christ as your Savior. It

starts by you turning from sin to Christ and putting all your trust on Him. When you put your faith in Christ, God pours His Gospel into your life. Will you put your faith in Christ today?

God preserves His people in hostile territory through the prayers of others and by personally intervening. Some of you are in hostile territory right now. Maybe there's some situation troubling you or some enemy threatening you. In a few moments, I'm going to pray. I want to invite anyone who faces some hostile situation right now to raise their hand. I will pray for those acknowledging that today. Some of you are not in hostile territory. Life's good or stable or normal. Will you then keep your eyes open for those around you that raise their hands when its time. Then will you silently pray for someone God lays on your heart to pray for during our closing prayer time. If God has revealed to you that you don't know Him, and you first need deliverance from that slavery, will you call out to Him as your Savior during our prayer.

Now would all of you who currently face hostile times or troubles please raise your hands? Let us pray.