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Exodus 17:8-16

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This morning we're continuing with our series on prayer.

We first looked at the privilege of prayer...

How we can come to God as our loving Father and know that he delights in our prayers.

Then we looked at the what, why, and how of prayer...

Getting a better understanding of prayer as being in a relationship with God.

Last week Pastor Rich preached from the Gospel of Matthew on "ask".

God is the giver of all we need to live life in his kingdom...

So what we need to do is seek out his will and ask...

Knowing that he loves to provide for us.

This week we're looking at intercessory prayer.

Prayer that takes the focus off of us...

And places it on another.

Where we go to God with requests on behalf of someone else.

At several points in the Bible we're instructed to pray for others:

Paul tells us to pray with all prayers and supplications for the saints. (Eph 6:18-20)

He also commands us to pray for all people, for kings and for those in authority. (1Tim 2)

Jesus himself teaches us to pray for our enemies...(Matt 5)

And he models intercessory prayer in John's Gospel when he prays for his disciples and for those who *will* believe. (John 17)

This morning we're looking at Moses...

A man who was constantly interceding for the Israelites before God.

It's a familiar story that gives us a powerful picture of how God uses us as instruments to advance his kingdom.

I invite you to turn with me in your pew Bibles to Exodus 17:8-16.

Hear now God's Word:

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 Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Nowhere in this passage does it say that Moses was praying for the people.

It doesn't say that he was uttering petitions under his breath for the people as they fought.

But, from the rest of the book of Exodus and Numbers we know that Moses *did* often intercede for the people before God in prayer.

When the people come out of Egypt and grumble against the Lord because they're thirsty, Moses cries out to the Lord and the Lord makes the water sweet. (Exodus 15)

Again when they're thirsty at Rephidim the people start complaining...

And again Moses cries out to God on behalf of the people...

And Moses is led to strike the rock which gushes out water. (Exo 17)

When his sister Mariam is afflicted with a skin disease because she challenged Moses' authority, Moses cries out to God, "Please heal her!" (Numbers 12)

When the people make and worship a golden calf Moses intercedes for them before God. (Exo 32)

Over and over again Moses is seen coming before God on behalf of others...

He enters into God's presence and brings these people before God.

This is what we see happening in our passage...

Moses, once again, is being used by God for the good of the people...

Interceding for them.

Right up front, we're told that the Israelites are attacked.

Now whenever I read about wars and battles my mind uses what it's familiar with...

I know from movies like *Saving Private Ryan* that it's bloody:

Two well-armed sides with their guns or swords clash and there's intense conflict.

But we have to understand the situation that's playing out in our passage...

And try to let go of the pictures we're given in movies.

Because Israel is not an established nation.

They don't have a professional army *per se* at this point.

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were *just* delivered from slavery in Egypt...

And now they're on their way to the land promised to them by God.

So when it says that they're attacked by this nomadic tribe of people—

The Amalekites—

We can guess that these former slaves are not at the peak of their military power.

In fact they're probably exhausted from their journey so far.

In Deuteronomy, we're also told of this attack. It says,

“Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were *weary and worn out*, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind.” (Deut 25:17-18)

Israel is free from Pharaoh now, but they're immediately attacked by the Amalekites.

We're told that those at the rear of the traveling caravan are especially vulnerable to attack...

Their enemy is smart and hits them where they are the weakest.

Let's stop there and relate that to our lives.

You're standing on top of a hill, watching your family, your neighbors or someone at work journey through life.

You notice some enemies come up behind them...

What do you see?

Where is the enemy attacking?

Where are they most susceptible? Most vulnerable?

Is it an addiction that's wreaking havoc on their life?

Is it a bad relationship or a broken marriage?

Is it feelings of loneliness or feelings of inadequacy?

Is it someone who only sees the bad things in life?

Who has had so much bad happen that they're forever cynical.

Maybe it's someone who struggles to know that God is real...

Or that God is good.

Maybe they doubt that they've been good enough to get God's approval—

They haven't heard the message of grace—

So they exhaust themselves trying to work harder.

Think of the people you see and interact with everyday...

Where is the darkness in their lives?

Where do they need the Lord to break through with his light?

Where do they need prayer—somebody to stand in for them?

Even those who look perfect—

Those who look like they have it all together—

They too are vulnerable and susceptible to the despair and darkness that fills this world.

Nothing is untouched by sin and brokenness...

The enemy knows that everyone has a thin place in their armor.

But the Lord uses his people to bring about redemption.

The Lord uses Moses as his instrument to grant his people victory...

And there's a tension that we need to hold together looking at this story...

A tension between God's work and God's desire to use his people to bring about his purposes.

Moses is standing on top of the hill overlooking the battle.

Standing with the staff of the Lord in his hand.

And whenever the staff is held high, the Israelites do well...

But whenever the staff lowers, the Israelites falter.

The staff in the hand of Moses represents the power of God—

It's a symbol of God's empowering presence. (Ruth Haley Barton, 114)

This is the same staff that Moses uses to strike the Nile and turn its water to blood.

This staff represents God's power through Moses that set the Israelites free.

God heard the cry of his people when they were in slavery...

And he sends Moses as his instrument of redemption.

And now this same rescuing God is coming to the aid of his people again.

But God doesn't just swallow up the Amalekite army...

He chooses to use Moses as his instrument again.

So when we say that the Lord gives victory to his people...

That's what we really mean, but he does it through Moses.

It's easy to become discouraged when we talk about intercessory prayer.

We look at Moses and his track record of interceding for the people...

The lengths he goes to see his people right with God...

And we say, "That was Moses! He was God's special leader."

"I can't be expected to intercede like that."

Intercessory prayer isn't easy for us.

For one, it's much easier to pray for our own needs.

On occasion we pray for the major needs of sick family or friends...

But that's only on occasion.

That and praying for others can be so overwhelming.

If we sat down and made a list of all the people we want to and should pray for we'd be praying for hours.

There is so much need in our families, in our schools, in our communities, in our church, in our government and in our world...

Where do we even begin?

Or sometimes we don't know *what* to pray for when we think of someone in need.

Maybe we have been faithful in prayer for others, but we don't think it matters.

We don't see fruit from our prayers after years of interceding for a loved one...

And so we become discouraged.

But know that the same God who used Moses as his instrument is using you and your prayers.

(same God same power)

He's using our prayers to bring about his redemption in this world.

Because we too have someone interceding on our behalf.

We too have someone praying for us...

Pleading for us before God the Father.

Right now Jesus Christ is at the Father's right hand interceding for us (as we read in Romans 8).

As Moses was to the Israelites, so Christ is to us...

Standing in for us, making us right with God...

Making us clean before God.

And because Christ in his humanity went away to intercede for us before the Father...

He gave us his Spirit.

Christ sent us the Holy Spirit to be with us.

And now that Spirit helps us in our prayers.

When we don't know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for us.

Because Christ sits at God's right hand, we know that our prayers are heard.

And because this Spirit lives in us, we know that our prayers have power...

They have power to effect God's transforming grace in the lives of those living in darkness.

It is an amazing thing (a total mystery) that the God of the universe would join us to his work...

And accomplish his purposes through our prayers.

I don't want to leave us without a practical way to pray for others.

If you struggle interceding for others in the ways we mentioned earlier here's one way to pray...

It comes from Ruth Haley Barton.

(A spiritual director and co-founder of the Transformation Center)

Think of your time in prayer as entering into a room with God.

You meet with the Lord and spend time with him in this room...

You enter into God's presence.

As you're enjoying your time in God's presence he brings someone to your mind...

So you invite that person into the room where you and God are spending time together...

Your spirit and God's Spirit are communing together, and you sit with that person too.

You don't have to run through a list of needs for that person...

All you're doing is holding that person in God's presence.

God's Spirit is already at work in this person's life long before you started praying for them...

All that you're doing is listening for that prayer...

And joining in on the Spirit's work.

You don't need to figure anything out or have an answer to their problems in your prayer...

What you're doing is bringing them into God's presence and letting His Spirit lead you.

You're trusting in the Lord to provide for what's needed.

Words may come to you or you may want to ask something for that person...

But they may not.

You may just sit with that person for a bit and then invite someone else into the room.

Know that the Lord is desiring to use you and your prayer as his instrument to bring healing to this broken world.

It's his Spirit moving in us leading us and empowering us as we pray.

Amen.