

## **In This Family Nobody Fights Alone**

Exodus 17:8-16

May 31, 2026

Good morning, Colonial! My name is Mark Potter, and I have the privilege of serving as the campus pastor here. Today we'll be taking a little hiatus from Genesis and flip the pages in our Bible forward one book to look at Exodus 17. But before we dive into this incredible story, I want to ask you a question:

What's the best gift you've ever received?

My favorite gift came during Christmas of 2020. At that time, I was engaged in a life-or-death battle. I was finishing up 5 months of intense cancer treatments and I was exhausted. My immune system was shot from all the chemo, and I didn't look or feel like myself. I was bald, pale, nauseous, and full of toxins. Not to mention I had gained 20 pounds. The side-effects from treatment were at an all-time high.

In addition, it was during peak COVID, so my family all had to quarantine in the weeks leading up to Christmas so we could all be together.

My whole extended family had gathered at our house on Christmas, and we had just opened our gifts. Soon after the last gift, as we were cleaning up, my wife walked around the corner with a surprise gift just for me. And as I opened it, my whole family came into our family room with matching t-shirts that read, "In This Family, Nobody Fights Alone."

(Show "In This Family Nobody Fights Alone" pic)

In that moment, as I held my sixth-month old and hugged my wife, I was overcome with God's goodness. And I realized that I could never win this battle alone. In order to overcome, I needed to rely on God's strength, and on my doctors, and on my army of family and friends who were supporting me by lifting me up in prayer.

Today we're going to read about a different kind of battle against a different enemy. But like my battle, they, too, had to lift each other up and rely on God to save them.

Please stand as we read together from Exodus 17:8-16:

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup> So 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." <sup>10</sup> So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup> Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, <sup>16</sup> saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Thank you, please be seated. Let's pray together. (pause to pray)

My sermon is titled, “In This Family Nobody Fights Alone” and it falls under three subheadings:

I. The Battle

II. The Memorial

III. The Man on the Middle Cross

Let’s begin with...

I. The Battle

The context of this passage is that Moses, the leader of the Israelites, is now eighty years old. God has recently led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, and He continued to miraculously provide for them in the desert, but despite God’s provision, the Israelites were quick to grumble and quarrel.

Here they are, in the middle of the wilderness, hungry and thirsty and grumpy and hangry. And so, in their frustration, they cry out to their leader, Moses, saying, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (Ex 17:3)

In other words, they ask, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

I want to pause and ask you if you have ever had that thought, the thought that God may have abandoned you. Have you ever wondered, “God, where are you? I mean, I’m out here barely making it. Is *this* your plan, God? For our children and livestock to starve to death in the desert? Is *this* your plan? For me to die from cancer and for my four young kids to grow up without a father? Please explain to me how *that* is a good plan.

Most of us have been there at one time or another, haven’t we? I know that many of you have persevered through some incredibly difficult circumstances – things that make you tear up whenever you talk about them; things so painful that you would rather not go there. Maybe you’ve been through a season like that in the past. Or maybe you’re in that season right now.

My family has been through seasons like that, and it’s very hard. But let me tell you something – as hard as those seasons are, rest assured that God has not abandoned you. The Lord is still among us, interceding for us and strengthening us by the power and presence of His Spirit. By God’s grace, these difficult seasons can actually lead to growth, causing us to mature in our faith as we reassess our priorities.

I always tell people that I would not wish cancer upon anyone, but I’m grateful I went through it because it helped me grow in my faith and empathize with others who are faced with similar hardships. It’s also amazing to look back in hindsight and see God’s hand of provision.

So how did God answer their cries for help? He told Moses strike the rock with his staff. Instead of arguing with God or refusing to act, Moses responded with obedience and out came water.

This morning I want to remind you that Yahweh, the One who miraculously delivered Israel from slavery... the same God who heard the Israelites’ grumbles in the wilderness and provided for them by sending bread from heaven and water from rocks -- that same God whom the Israelites cried out to in the wilderness -- is the same God who hears your cries and my cries. And He is still in the business of ministering to us during hard times despite our grumbling and complaining.

And so, on the heels of God's repeated provision, the Israelites suddenly felt a renewed sense of God's power and presence. But their faith would now be tested again. For here at Rephidim, they will face their toughest battle yet... a battle against the Amalekites.

So, who were the Amalekites? They were seminomadic people led by Amalek, who was the grandson of Esau and the great, great grandson of Abraham, making Amalek a distant relative of Moses.

Many of you recall the sibling rivalry between Esau and Jacob: Esau sold his sacred birthright for a bowl of lentil stew, forfeiting his father Isaac's blessing. In doing so, Esau chose immediate, selfish, worldly gratification over God's covenant promises. Esau went on to marry a Hittite woman, which created further animosity between Esau and the covenant community of faith. It was within this context that Amalek and his army operated. The Amalekites were worldly, godless, perennial rivals of the Israelites, attempting to destroy them for their own selfish gains.

Despite being a thorn in the side of the Israelites for several centuries, by the Eighth Century BCE the final remnant of the Amalekites were destroyed, or "utterly blotted out" from human history as God promised. But even to this day, the Amalekite name is used as a symbolic archetype of evil and antisemitism against the Jewish people. The "modern Amalek" represents any hateful individual or terrorist organization that seeks to attack or destroy the Jewish people.

According to Old Testament scholar John Goldingay, "In Jewish thinking, Hitler was the twentieth-century Amalekite. The president of Israel referred to Amalek in his letter declining to show mercy to the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann."<sup>1</sup>

Simply put, the Amalekites were bad dudes.

Here in Exodus 17 the Amalekites sneak up on the Israelites, who are extremely vulnerable because they are inexperienced, unfamiliar with the terrain, and under resourced.

But they have one massive advantage: God is on their side.

Keep in mind that there are four main characters in our story that play a vital role in preserving victory for the Israelites: Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua.

Moses, of course, is the iconic prophet and leader of the Israelites best known for guiding them out of slavery in Egypt and leading them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. As a prophet, Moses communicated God's message to His people, effectively serving as God's spokesman. We see this on full display a few chapters later when God gives Moses the Ten Commandments.

Moses was also fiercely obedient and humble. In fact, the Bible says that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3), which is a bit ironic and humorous because it's commonly believed that Moses wrote Numbers. Imagine writing about yourself that you are the most humble person alive. It's a bit presumptuous, perhaps, but who am I to argue with God's Word?

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<sup>1</sup> John Goldingay, [\*Exodus and Leviticus for Everyone\*](#), Old Testament for Everyone (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press; Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2010), 72.

The next character is Joshua. This is the first time Joshua is mentioned in the Bible. In Hebrew, it's pronounced, "Yehoshua," and the name means, "The Lord is salvation." Joshua was a young warrior and the eventual protégé of Moses who would lead Israel into the Promised Land following Moses' death. His core characteristics include unwavering faith, exceptional military leadership, deep obedience to God, and a legacy of courage and integrity.

In addition to Moses and Joshua, we have Aaron. Aaron was the older brother of Moses and the first High Priest of the Israelites. Appointed by God to assist Moses, Aaron also played a crucial role in leading God's people out of slavery during the Exodus. As the High Priest, Aaron would come to be seen as the supreme religious leader, serving as the ultimate mediator between God and the Israelites. Priests oversaw temple administration, offered daily sacrifices, and interceded for God's people.

Finally, we have Hur. Hur is the least known of the four, but he still plays an important role in our story. Hur is most famous for his close association with Moses and Aaron. He is mentioned here alongside Aaron holding up Moses' arms during the Battle of Rephidim, and again when Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Notably, Hur was from the tribe of Judah, which was the kingly line of the Nation of Israel, whereas Moses and Aaron were Levites.

While at Rephidim, the Israelites can sense the Amalekites sneaking up on them, so Moses tells Joshua to assemble an army. Meanwhile, Moses, staff in hand, tells Aaron and Hur to join him at the top of the hill. Our passage says that:

<sup>11</sup> Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

I want to pause there and ask, why do you think Moses felt the need to raise his hands during battle? What exactly was he doing, and what was he trying to induce?

The text doesn't specify, but we do know from other parts of Scripture that whenever Moses raised his staff, God's power reigned down. Moses' staff was a symbol of divine power and authority, like when God turned it into a snake at the burning bush, or when it brought forth plagues on the Egyptians, or when it was used to part the Red Sea.

In addition, it was customary for the Jewish people to lift their hands during prayer. For example, in Psalm 28:2, which says:

Hear my cry for mercy  
as I call to you for help,  
as I lift up my hands  
toward your Most Holy Place.

The Apostle Paul later instructs Timothy to encourage the lifting of hands in 1 Tim 2:8, saying, "Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing."

So, what was Moses doing on the top of the hill? He was doing exactly what you and I do when we raise up our arms in prayer and worship. It's the same thing my six-year-old does whenever

he sings the Doxology. Moses was crying out to God in prayer and worship attempting to evoke the power and presence of the Lord.

As a result of God's sovereign power, the Israelites, despite being at a severe disadvantage from an experience and resource and man-power perspective, "overwhelmed Amalek and his people," claiming victory.

Now, anytime I read an Old Testament story, I ask myself two questions:  
Who am I in the story?  
How does this story point to Christ?

I want to ask you the first question now, and the second question we'll get to in a bit.

Given the character choices, who are you in the story? In other words, who in the story can you most relate with?

Are you like Moses, a weary, wise, aging leader who prayerfully seeks the Lord's will and relies on the strength of God and others to lift you up?

Are you like Joshua, a natural-born leader who obediently and courageously fights the good fight on the front lines of ministry to the glory of God?

Or are you like Aaron or Hur, Godly servants who play an essential role in helping support an appointed leader (Moses) in order to advance God's mission?

Hopefully you are not like Amalek, opposing God and picking fights with God's people!

Truthfully, I have taken the role of all of these at various points in my life, but when I was diagnosed with cancer, I related most with Moses because I needed to rely on others to hold me up as I engaged in a battle for my life. And I was so incredibly blessed to have hundreds of Aarons and Hurs lifting me up by praying for me and serving my family while I struggled with fatigue.

Who are you in the story? is a helpful question to spend some time reflecting on throughout the week.

However, before we get to the second question, "How does this story point to Jesus?," I want to move into my second subheading:

## II. The Memorial

After the Israelites win the battle against the Amalekites, the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup>And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, <sup>16</sup>saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

This past Monday we celebrated Memorial Day. Some of us celebrated by going to the pool or the lake, but many of you celebrated by visiting a cemetery. Why? Because bringing flowers to a gravestone is a tangible way to memorialize, or commemorate, or preserve the memory of someone or something worth remembering. Specifically, Memorial Day is a day set aside to

remember and give thanks for the great sacrifice of all those who lost their lives on the battlefield for our freedom. It was first observed on May 1, 1865, in Charleston, South Carolina, where hundreds of newly freed slaves marched, prayed, and laid flowers to express their gratitude for fallen Union soldiers whose sacrifice helped secure their victory and freedom.

Similarly, in our Scripture passage, God commanded Moses to memorialize the Israelites' victory over its adversary. But instead of building a gravestone, God commanded Moses to write his experience in a book that would serve as a tangible reminder of God's victory, which could be passed down from one generation to the next. Memorializing, therefore, is a spiritual practice.

So, what's a modern example of a spiritual memorial that can be passed down?

When I was undergoing cancer treatment, I wanted to document my experience and share it with my kids. Mind you, at the time, I didn't know how this story was going to end. But I had the idea of creating a book for each of them as a way of memorializing God's journey with us. The entire process took about a year and a half to complete, and the books were given to each of my boys on Christmas two years after my diagnosis.

Is it ok if I read the first couple pages to you?

(Show pics of the first couple pages of *A Potterstrong Memoir from Daddy* as I read aloud).

"Dear Micah, when I found out I was sick with cancer I decided to make a book for you and your brothers because I wanted to let you know just how much I love you and how proud I am to be your dad. This book is dedicated to you and to your mom, who is a true superwoman. I hope you like it. I certainly enjoyed writing in it.

"Buddy, we learned of some sad news the other day. Your daddy has a disease called cancer. I'm going to be ok because God has a plan, but the next year will be tough for us all. I will lose my energy and my hair, and I may look sick. But no matter how sick I feel, I want you to know that I will never give up on you, your brothers, or mommy. I know you need me, and I need you too. Whenever you think of it, say a prayer for me, son. And I'll do the same for you. I love you more than I can describe. We're going to make it, as long as we stick together and lean on God for strength."

Memorializing your journey with God is a spiritual practice, and doing so is always a good idea because it's not my idea... it's God's idea. Never hesitate to document the great things God has done and the battles He's helped you overcome.

After documenting how God carried the Israelites to victory, Moses then built an altar and called it, "Yahweh/Jehovah Nissi" which translates to, "The Lord is my Banner." In Hebrew, the root word, *nes* refers to a pole, flag, or rallying point. In ancient warfare a *nes* was the signal pole around which troops rallied and advanced. By naming an altar Yahweh Nissi, Moses identified the LORD Himself as Israel's rallying point, identity, and source of triumph or salvation. The altar commemorated the battle while acknowledging that the LORD—not human ability—secured Israel's victory.

This is not the only time that the banner motif is found in the Old Testament, however. It's sprinkled throughout the Old Testament including a few times in the Torah as well as in the prophetic books and in the poetic books. For example, in Psalm 20:5, David uses it within the context of worship when he says, "May we shout for joy at your victory and raise a banner in the

name of our God.”

Every time we worship God through song, we are essentially raising a banner to the Lord, for He is our rallying point, our identity, our source of triumph, and our salvation. But the rallying point itself is not a musical instrument, or the chancel, or even the songs we raise. Our rallying point, or banner, is the symbol of the cross. In Christ, the Old Testament concept of a physical altar is abolished. The New Testament shifts our focus to the cross of Jesus Christ as the ultimate, once-for-all sacrifice for human sin leading to salvation and victory over the enemy.

This leads me to my third and final subheading:

### III. The Man on the Middle Cross

Earlier I said that whenever I read the Old Testament, I always try to ask myself two questions: Who am I in the story? And how does this story point to Jesus? It's now time to address the latter question, how does this story point to Jesus?

Let's refer back to the characters in the story.

Jesus is the true Joshua, or Yeshua -- “The God of salvation” who has defeated the enemy and saved God's people.

Jesus is the true Hur, the obedient servant from the Kingly line of Judah.

Jesus is the true Aaron, the Great High Priest and Mediator whose sacrificial offering atones for the sins of God's people.

And Jesus is the true Moses -- God's humble Prophet whose intercessory prayers and outstretched arms upon a hill led to God's eternal victory.

Friends, in this battle called life, nobody fights alone because Christ is among us, in us, behind us, and before us, fighting the battle on our behalf. Take heart, for we are on the winning side!

Do you believe this, church? Do you believe that God can save you from the enemy called Satan? Do you believe that He can save you from the enemy called fear, or doubt, or shame, or pride, or anger, or lust, or hopelessness? Do you believe that God cares enough to wipe away your tears, and big enough to win your battle against addiction, materialism, bitterness, or self-hatred?

Some of are you thinking, “I want to believe, but I can't. I feel inadequate. I'm not qualified, I'm not theological enough or competent enough or holy enough. I've done too many horrible things. I'm unlovable. I'm unworthy. I lack enough faith required to get into heaven.”

Scottish preacher Alistair Begg does a brilliant job of speaking into this myth. Suffice it to say that salvation is not about you. So, stop making it about you.

He says we should be quick to remember the thief on the cross in Luke 23:42-43, who asked Jesus to remember him on his deathbed, to which Jesus responds with, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Begg says he'd love to eavesdrop on the criminal's initial interaction with the angel.

“What are you doing here?” The angel asked, perplexed.

“You were cussing the guy out with your friend. You never did a Bible study; you never got baptized; you never knew anything about church membership. And yet, you made it! How did you make it?”

The thief said, “I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?”

“Well, it’s because I don’t know!”

“Excuse me, let me go get my supervisor angel.” So, the angel flies over to go get his supervisor. “Just a few questions for you, sir. First, are you clear on the doctrine of justification by faith?”

The thief says, “I’ve never heard of it in my life.”

“Well, how much of the Scripture have you memorized?”

“None.”

“What do you know about the Trinity?”

“Nothing.”

“Sanctification?”

“What’s that?”

In his frustration, the angel then asks, “On what basis are you here?”

And the thief said, “The man on the middle cross said I can come.”

Friends, never take your eyes off He who has overcome the cross. For Christ is our rallying point, our identity, our source of triumph, and our salvation.

Listen, your salvation does not depend on you. Make no mistake: I could not save myself from dying from cancer. And we cannot save ourselves from dying from our sin-sick state. You are not saved by your good works. You are not saved by your professions, or by your church attendance, or by your theology, or even by your baptism. You are saved because of what Christ has achieved.

We are saved by grace through faith.... That is, the faith and faithfulness of Christ!

So no matter what enemy you’re facing – whether your enemy is named Amalek, or cancer, or depression, or loneliness, or gossip, or racism, or infidelity, or anger, or temptation that comes from Satan himself – always remember that in God’s family, nobody fights alone.... Because Christ is with us, and He is victorious.

Pray to close