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The scripture reading this morning is Psalm 63, written by David when he was in the desert of Judah, likely hiding from his enemies. "O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods. With singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you. I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me. They who seek my life will be destroyed. They will go down into the depths of the earth. They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. But the king will rejoice in God. All who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouth of liars will be silenced." Good morning. Let me pray. Let me Father thank you for this opportunity to be here today and to share with my friends. Please help them to hear from you exactly the message that you would like them to hear. In our family we have a hero. My grandpa Lash, who some of you knew, he was an incredible man. He was an incredible runner. In June 1936 he broke the world record for the two mile and then in August 1936 he ran in the Olympics in Berlin. He was in the FBI and there was lots of great stories about what he did there. He was in the Indiana State House of Representatives. He carved a campground out of the forest which later became the grounds for the FCA camp. He started a successful real estate business in Rockville, Indiana. And he used his fame from all that other stuff to travel around and be a motivational speaker. He was very successful at a lot of different things. And because of this he is held in high esteem in our family. We are proud of him. We look for opportunities to tell people about him. We try to get involved in anything that has to do with him. There's a Wikipedia page about him and I almost feel a little upset that someone outside the family maintains that page, as if we have some sort of privileged claim to him. And you know the way that our family lifts up Donald Lash is a lot like the way Christians are supposed to lift up the Lord. We should be proud of the Lord. He should be held in our highest esteem. We should look for opportunities to tell people about him. We should try to get involved with things that have to do with him. God is the one we should be lifting up because as much as I love my grandpa, my God is infinitely better and my grandpa would be the first one to agree with that. And there is a Bible story about this truth and not only that but in this Bible story we learn one of the names of God which also relates to this idea. In Exodus 17.8 right after the place where Moses first struck the rock and caused water to come forth, this is where we find that famous story of Moses and Joshua fighting Amalek. In this story, as you may recall, Amalek has attacked Israel and so Moses sent Joshua with some men to go fight back. And then Moses went up on a hill and he raised his hands and as long as his hands were raised, Israel prevailed against Amalek. But when he let his hands down, Amalek would start to prevail. And so after a while, since this battle was taking all day, it happened that Moses' arms were getting tired. And so there were two men up on the hill with them named Aaron and her. And they piled up some rocks to make a seat for Moses and then they supported his hands so that his hands would remain raised until the sun went down that day. And because of this, Joshua and his men defeated Amalek and his men. And after all this, two things happened. First, God instructed Moses to make a record that he promised to completely blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And second, Moses built an altar there. He named that altar "Yehovah Nisi" which means "The Lord is my banner." Jehovah is my banner. This is the only place in this Bible where this term is used and yet it's such a powerful illustration and such a meaningful name that there is much we can learn from thinking on this. And so that's what we're going to do this morning. Primarily, we're going to be talking about a military banner. But that word "banner" there, it could also mean "flag." It could also mean the sail of a ship. And so I'll leave it up to you later on to go home and think about what does it mean that the Lord is my flag or what does it mean that the Lord is my sail? Because there's a lot there that you could definitely think about. But we're talking about the Lord is my banner. First off, the banner is what soldiers would rally around and march behind. When it came time to go out and meet the enemy, one man was given, or sometimes several men, were given the very important job of standing front and center and holding up a long pole with their army's banner atop it. And the others around him were instructed that if that man holding that banner should fall, another must pick the banner up because every soldier relied on seeing that banner throughout the fight. And at any point during the battle, a soldier could look up from wherever he was and he could see that banner and so he would know where he should be standing. He would know how far his side had pressed forward into the enemy. The Lord himself is supposed to be that which we rally around and march behind. Now too many churches and too many people have rallied around smooth talkers. They have rallied around worship services with high production value. And too many have rallied around ideas, organizations, and traditions instead of around God himself. It is unfortunate how easy it is to get swept along in the currents of something that seems godly, but in reality is just the making of men. Psalm 127 verse 1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it." We should be careful in whatever we do, both personally and corporately, to make sure that we march in step with the Lord. Now sadly some people take what I just said and think that that means that unless they get some sort of burning bush that they better stand quite still and not move unless they fall into some sort of ruin. But that's not what I'm saying. I believe Pastor Keith was quoting his wife when he said, "You can't steer a ship unless it's moving." God has given each of us skills and talents and desires, and he wants us to creatively step out in faith and put those talents and skills and desires to use for his kingdom. But as you step, listen to the gentle leading of his spirit in your heart, and if you have no conviction or correction about what you're doing, then just go for it. Keep it up and trust God. God will steer you once you're moving. So next, the banner is what gives the soldiers hope and strength. As we just said, in the midst of battle, surrounded by chaos and death, a soldier could look up from wherever he was and see his side's banner. A banner isn't any sort of weapon. It's just a guy standing in the middle of a bunch of other guys who are all trying to kill each other, holding up a pole with a flag on it. And when some soldier looks over and sees in the midst of all this chaos that his team still manages to protect this guy standing out there waving his flag, well that gives him hope. Even if things aren't looking so good right here where he's standing, at least over there, there is some semblance of order and control, and that gives him hope for the situation he is in and the internal strength to keep fighting. Friends, as we enter into the battles that we face in our lives, God should be the one we look to for hope and strength. He is the sure foundation. Romans 10, 11 says, "For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.'" Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame. If you're relying on your money to get you through trouble, then you're standing on sinking sand. If you're relying on people's opinion of you or your pretty face, or God help you the stability of our government, you have chosen to build your house on sand instead of a lock. 1 Chronicles 5, verses 19 and 20 says, "The sons of Reuben the Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh made war against the Hagrites, Jethuar, Naphish, and Mudab. And they were helped against them, and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all who were with them. For they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer because they put their trust in him." Who do you cry out to when things get chaotic in your life? Is God the first one you turn to, or the last hope, the last possible chance? He should be the first thing. He heeded their prayer because they put their trust in him. Next, the banner is put proudly on display. When soldiers march off to battle, they know that their lives are being put on the line. There is no doubt in their minds the cost of what they're about to do. They have sacrificed all, and they are laying down their lives to achieve victory in this battle. They know some of them won't be coming home. Essentially, they have died to themselves. But because of this attitude, they no longer have to feel guilt or shame about the cause they are fighting for. They may not completely agree with the authority behind their army, but they have resigned themselves to their fate into what must be done, and so they say, "Lift the banner. I don't have to be embarrassed or ashamed. Lift it high." They are filled with boldness because they are on their way to crush those who oppose them, to charge out into the open in the light of day where everyone can see them to stand and fight and die for their cause. This same attitude is seen in Christians who live in hostile countries. They are daily, vividly reminded of the cost of following Christ. They could lose their possessions, their families, and even their lives. Again, I'm not talking about soldiers anymore. We're talking about Christians, the men and the women and the children who know that to follow the Lord could mean death. They have counted the cost, and they have chosen the difficult path. They have chosen to follow the Lord. There is such bravery and boldness in how they live their Christian lives. Now, this puts to shame many of the Christians who live in comfortable, safe countries. For some reason, when reputation and comfort are the only things on the line, suddenly lifting up the Lord in our lives becomes more difficult. But this shouldn't be the case. Remember, the reason Israel won their battle was because they lifted up the Lord. When we give into fear and hide Him under a bushel, should we be surprised if we start losing the battles in our lives? This is the very principle laid out in this story. Lift Him up and He will deliver you. Put Him on display as your deliverer. Prove to the Lord that He is more important than comfort and popularity, and He will prove to you that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. That's 2 Chronicles 16.9. So put Him proudly on display. Next, the banner is carried into enemy territory. It's true that the banner the soldiers carry probably has some sort of insignia or design that can be seen on all the flags and the buildings all over their kingdom. But this specific banner, the one being carried by the soldiers, this one is being taken to the enemy. This is a war banner and it is carried into battle. The Lord is what we should be lifting up in our battles. When trials and difficulties come, we should make it clear to all who observe us that it is the Lord we are putting our trust in. It is the Lord who we look to for strength. And it is the Lord who we look to for wisdom and guidance as to how to deal with our situation. What must people think when we are willing to turn to lawyers and self-help books and drugs and alcohol and gossiping with our friends and internet wisdom and all these other solutions and yet not turn to God? When we try to tell people that God is all powerful and that He loves us enough to send His Son to death and that He hears our prayers and He lives within us and never leaves us or forsakes us, when we tell people these things that in our times of trial we don't turn to Him, what does that tell people? It tells people that we don't really believe. It tells people that we've learned all the Christian catch-raises so that we fit in at church and that we belong to the Christian club, but in our hearts, He's not very real to us. Now I'm not saying that counselors and lawyers and all the rest don't have their place and many times we need to use those resources. My brother is a great example. He's a God-fearing man and he's got people all over this country praying for his housing situation, but he's also using a lawyer to help get his problem sorted out. The point, the difference, is to ask yourself, "What is the main thing you're relying on? What are you lifting up as your banner in this trial? Is it God? If He's just a fairy tale to you, you're probably not going to rely on Him in the difficult times. But if you believe, if you turn to Him first and trust Him to lead you to the right solution, He will not fail you." When we're truly trusting God, we can actually praise God for the good outcome to our situation even when we don't yet see the outcome. That is the mark of someone lifting up God in their battles. Next, the banner represents their authority. If an army was carrying a banner into battle, you can be certain that the reason they were marching into battle was because of whatever that banner represented. If that banner was their king's banner, they were fighting that battle for their king because he commanded it. U.S. soldiers didn't put Mexican flags on their uniforms before going off to fight in the wars. U.S. soldiers fought for the U.S. and it was U.S. flags on their uniforms and flying above their bases. If our country didn't order our soldiers to go somewhere and fight, then they didn't go there. When other country soldiers saw troops and ships and whatever with our flag coming to fight them, they knew that it wasn't just these men, but our country and our governments sending these troops. That flag represents the authority that they were acting under. A Lord should be our authority. When we do what we do, both as individuals and as this church, we should be endeavoring to carry out the will of the Lord. And when people look at us, again, both as individuals and as a church, when they know we are Christians, they assume that we're acting under the authority of God. If we do a thing, they assume that's what Christians are supposed to be doing. If we don't do a thing, they assume that's what Christians are not supposed to be doing. The problem arises when we obey authorities other than God. When we do things that God forbids or when we don't do the things He commands, people think we're either crazy or that we're cowards or that we're hypocrites. And when we try to skirt the line, when we try to get away with just as much as possible, it shows that we are good at being legalistic, but that our hearts don't really belong to God. Matthew 15.8, Jesus says, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." The Bible says God would rather that we didn't offer any sacrifices to Him than to offer sacrifices from hearts that don't love Him and lift Him up as the Lord. He would rather have none of it. So let's make a firm, clear decision to make the Lord our absolute authority. Let's lift Him up clear and proud and stay away from skirting the line. Let's leave people with no question in their minds who our authority is so that as it says in 1 Peter 2.12, "Have your conduct honorable among the Gentiles so that when they speak against you, they may by your good works, which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." My last point today is that the banner is the first thing targeted by the enemy. So when I started writing this message, the thought struck me that certainly someone else has spoken on this topic before. And so I did an internet search and lo and behold, Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, gave a sermon on this topic. He touched on a lot of the same points. Well, I chose not to read it because I didn't want to inadvertently plagiarize anything. And I didn't want to distract myself from whatever God might be trying to say to me. But there was one bullet point he had listed and I really wanted to include it here and I have to give him the credit. And it was this one, the banner is the first thing targeted by the enemy. Now having discussed all these important features of the military banner and what it represents, it makes obvious sense that to take out the opposing army's banner would deal a significant blow to that army. And so, yes, armies targeted each other's banners to try and weaken the opposing side. Our enemy, the devil, and his forces of darkness, more than anything, want to make sure that you are not lifting up the Lord as your banner. The devil is fully aware of the power that comes from lifting up the Lord. He knows that God stands powerfully on the side of those who lift him up. And so he's going to do whatever it takes to get you to drop your banner or to lift up a false banner. Or in the case of a church, take out the people who are lifting up the banners for that church. I know some people who used to go to this church and when I speak to them and when I read their Facebook posts, everything is just politics, politics, politics. They say mean, offensive things about political candidates and about the people who support them. This dishonors God. The devil has won a victory over these people by attacking their banner and getting them to replace it with a new one. But let me say this for our church. We are a politically diverse bunch, but it's hard to notice because the people here are good about not letting that kind of thing get in the way of what's really important, which is Jesus. So kudos to you. Keep that up. But don't let your guard down because the devil hasn't rolled over just yet. My point here is this. The banner raisers in an army were some of the bravest men on the battlefield. Our Lord calls you to be brave because when you live your life lifting him up, you will come under attack. But the Lord will deliver to you the victory, lift him high and he will lift you up. So in conclusion, simply this. As you go throughout this week, lift up the Lord. I spent this past week just literally imagining that I'm carrying around a banner that said Jesus on it because I'm kind of a very visual, imaginative kind of guy. And it's begun to have an effect. I walk into situations with my coworkers when I'm out in public and I think to myself, at this moment, I am proudly, boldly putting on display the Lord Jesus. And it makes me a little bit braver. It makes me more likely to not join in to the things I shouldn't be part of. And it makes me a little more bolder when it comes time to say the things that need to be said. And so lift up the Lord. It's hard for me to go like this. Even up here in front of you guys, I know you love me. But being bold, being like that is something that's difficult for me and it's probably difficult for a lot of you. But we need to practice and we need to put him on display. And you need to remember that when you do, when you put him on display, he will deliver to you the victory. Let's pray. Lord God, Yehovah, you are our banner. And we repent of the times that we have not proudly lifted you up and put you on display. We repent of the times that we have relied on some other authority. And God, now we, in turning from all that, we turn to you, we lift you up, we praise you and give you the glory and the honor you deserve. And we rely completely and solely on you to deliver us the victory in everything that we do in our lives. And we praise you for this right now, for the victories that aren't even yet among us. We praise you for those victories. In Jesus name, Amen.