

JEHOVAH NISSI

What's in a name? The things we call people tend to change as our relationship with them changes. For example, if you were to ask me in the summer of 1989 who Naomi Humphrys was I would have said "never met her". In the fall of 1989 I would say "she's that girl I met in the cafeteria - what a babe!". In the spring of 1990 I would say "she's my girlfriend". In the fall of 1990 I would say "she's me fiancée". In the fall of 1991 I would say "I don't know a Naomi Humphrys - I know Naomi Sheane and she's my wife." Over time even more names have been added – help mate, mother of my children, encourager, boss ... just kidding about that last one.

As the Israelites grew in their relationship with God, the names they called Him also changed. Today we are starting a new series called Revealed. We will be looking at the names that God has given us (revealed to us) to call Him by, and what each name reveals about the character of God.

In Exodus 17 the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites. Maybe you remember the story. They fought one another and as long as Moses had his staff raised they were winning the battle. Whenever the staff dropped they lost. Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands as Joshua fought and eventually the Israelites win. After winning the battle Moses built an altar and called it Jehovah Nissi. The Hebrew word Nissi comes from the word NACE which means STANDARD and is a derivative of the Hebrew word which means to LIFT UP.

What does THE LORD MY BANNER really mean? It is talking about the fact that when we get into trouble what is it that we lift up? Banners reveal identity and are a rallying point for the people. The name THE LORD MY BANNER really means GOD OUR DEFENDER. In saying that God is our banner we mean that God is the one who we trust to defend us when times get tough.

When was the last time you faced a situation where the odds were against you? The odds of you winning the lottery in America are against you. I don't know how any sane person plays the lottery. It was calculated that you are six times more likely to be struck by lightning than to win the lottery. If you drive ten miles to buy a California Lotto ticket you are three times more likely to be killed in an auto accident than to win at California lottery.

Here are the odds on how you will die. The odds are that you will die in a car wreck are one in a hundred. That you will die in a fire are one in 800. That you will die by electrocution are one in 5000. That you will die in a flood are one in 30,000 or in a tornado - one in 60,000. That you will die by a venomous bite or sting - one in 100,000. That you will be killed by lightning - one in 2.8 million. (By the way, the world record of being struck by lightning is a guy named Roy Sullivan, a forest ranger. He's been struck seven times by lightning). The odds that you will die by food poisoning are one out of three million. For some of you who are bad cooks the odds are a little higher ...

Sometimes it seems the odds are against you. Sometimes it seems life has stacked the deck of cards for you to lose. Brian Hice had a day like that in Provo, Utah. First, his apartment became flooded from a broken pipe in the apartment above his. So his manager told him to go rent a water vacuum. That's when he discovered that he had a flat tire. He changed it, went inside again to phone a friend for help but standing in water and grabbing the phone, the electrical shock he got so startled him that he accidentally ripped the phone off the wall. By the time he was ready to leave, water damage had swelled his door jammed shut and he had to yell for a neighbor to come and kick the door down. While this was all going on somebody stole his car.

Have you ever had a day like that? Do you ever feel like everybody and everything around you is ganging up against you? What do you do when you're facing insurmountable, overwhelming problems? You call on Jehovah Nissi – GOD MY DEFENDER. Let me illustrate this by giving you a story from Israel's history that shows this principle:

2 Chr 20:1 After this, the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. 2 Some men came and told Jehoshaphat, "A vast army is coming against you from Edom, from the other side of the Sea. It is already in Hazazon Tamar" (that is, En Gedi). 3 Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. 4 The people of Judah came together to seek help from the LORD; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him. 5 Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard 6 and said: "O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."

The odds here were heavily stacked against little Israel. Three nations had brought their armies together to destroy them. Maybe the enemy you are facing this morning is not a foreign army but something else. Whatever you are facing you can learn from Jehoshaphat how to properly face challenges when they come:

1. TURN TO GOD FIRST – vs. 3

In verse 3 it says that Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD. As soon as he heard that there was a problem he turned to God for help.

Years ago, a boy went into a drug store to buy candy. He asked for it to be wrapped in 1 lb., 3 lb., and 5lb. packages. Curious, the druggist asked why? The boy explained that he had a date with a pretty girl that night and that after he had dinner with her and her parents he was going to go out on the front porch with the girl. If she held his hand, he would give her the 1 lb. box of candy. If she let him put his arm around her, he'd give her the 3 lb. box. But if she let him kiss her, he was going to give her the 5lb. box. Later that night when he sat down at the dinner table, the father of the girl asked the boy to pray for the meal. He prayed and prayed and prayed. He prayed for every missionary, every church and pastor in town. When he finally finished, the girl commented that she didn't realize that he was so religious. To which the boy replied, "And I didn't realize your dad was the druggist!"

Turn to prayer first. Prayer should be your first choice, not your last resort. If you want God to help you overcome the odds in any area of your life you have to turn to Him first. Unfortunately too often we see prayer as a last resort rather than as our first thought. Prayer is usually something you do way down the line after you've tried everything else. People will say, "I guess all we can do now is pray!" Prayer should be our first line of defense – not our last.

At the wedding in Cana Mary saw that there was a problem – the host had run out of wine. Instead of worrying about the problem or laying blame to whose fault it was she simply took the problem to Jesus and told Him to fix it.

Notice that this passage begins in verse 1 by saying that AFTER THIS there came a battle. After what? In the previous chapter, 2 Chronicles 19 there is the story of a great national revival, a spiritual awakening. There's great joy in the country, prosperity, blessing. It is after this that the enemy attacks.

Success and blessing can lead you into a false sense of security.

We all know this principle, that with every high there is also a low, with every mountaintop there is a valley. And after every victory, there is always a letdown. And with every blessing there comes a testing. You may not be in a battle right now but you're going to be in one tomorrow or the next day or the day after that. You may be in a time of blessing right now, soaring. You're on the mountaintop. But you're going to come down eventually. When that happens – turn to God in prayer first. Never let an impossible situation intimidate you. Let it motivate you. Let it motivate you to pray more, expect more from God and depend more on His strength.

2. TALK TO GOD – vs. 6

Jehoshaphat turned God in prayer. What is important is the way that he came in prayer. He did not simply come to God with a list of requests and demands. In verse 6 he prays “O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you.” He entered into prayer remembering who God was and what God had already done for them in the past. He just spent time talking with God.

2Ch 20:12 O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

Jehoshaphat recognized that, even though he did not have the resources to defeat the enemy, that God did. He says to God “we do not know what to do.” Have you ever prayed that prayer? Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt powerless, like there was a problem in your marriage, your career, or somewhere in your life that you thought was overwhelming? You feel you cannot go on. Maybe you can identify with this poem:

The world had a hopeful beginning but man spoiled it all by sinning
We trust that the story will end in God's glory, but right now the other side's winning.

A little boy was spending his Saturday morning playing in his sandbox. In the process of creating roads and tunnels for his toy cars, he discovered a large rock in the middle of the sandbox. The boy dug around the rock, managing to dislodge it from the dirt. He pushed and nudged the rock across the sandbox by using his feet. He was a very small boy and this was a very large rock. When he got it to the edge of the sandbox, however, he found that he couldn't roll it up and over the little wall. Determined the little boy pushed, shoved and pried but every time he thought he had made progress the rock fell back into the sandbox. Again the little boy pushed and shoved until he smashed his chubby fingers and burst into tears of frustration.

All this time the boy's father watched from the living room window as the drama unfolded. At the moment the tear fell, a large shadow fell across the boy and the sandbox. It was the boy's father. Gently but firmly he said, “Son, why didn't you use all the strength you had available?” Defeated the boy sobbed back, “But I did, daddy, I did. I used all the strength I had!” “No, son,” corrected the father kindly. “You didn't use all the strength you had. You didn't ask me.” And then the father reached down, picked up the rock and removed it from the sandbox.

Talk to God about the situation you are in. There is no problem that is too big and there is no problem that is too small for you to pray about.

It says here that Jehoshaphat prayed aloud. Sometimes you need to pray aloud. I have found that there is something about praying aloud that is very helpful when hardships come. Find a nice quiet and secluded place and pour your heart out to him.

Sir Thomas More said, "The world does not need so much to be informed as to be reminded." So the Bible says again and again "Forget not!" and "Remember! Remember! Remember!"

When you are talking to God make sure to tell Him how you feel. Part of prayer is being open and honest with God about your feelings. When you are going through trials it is OK to express your feelings – from anger to fear to hopelessness. One of the things I like the most about the Psalms is that they contain every emotion known to man.

Don't be afraid to tell God how you feel. He has seen it all and knows everything there is to know about you.

3. TRUST GOD TO HELP YOU – vs. 15-17

The fruit of fervent prayer is not that God will hear you but that you will ultimately hear from God. The last part of verse 12 says "our eyes are upon you". When life seems impossible then take your eyes off the problems around you and focus on God.

If you ask most people who are going through trials "How are you doing?" they will say something like, "I'm doing ok, under the circumstances." What does that mean - under the circumstances? What are you doing under them? Who put you there? Why don't you get on top of the circumstances? Circumstances are like a mattress on your bed. You get on top of them and you'll rest easy. You get underneath them and you're going to suffocate.

If you look at the world, you will be distressed. If you look within, you will be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you will be at rest – Corrie Ten Boom

In the middle of the struggle God spoke to Jahaziel. It is interesting that God used him to bring these words of encouragement. He was a Levite and a descendant of Asaph – a worship leader. If you want to hear from God make sure you get into worship.

2 Chr 20:15 He said: "Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the LORD says to you: `Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. 16 Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. 17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'" "

4. THANK GOD IN ADVANCE – vs. 19-22

The nation responded to God's promise with praise. Jehoshaphat placed the praise singers out in front of the army because he believed that God would do what he said and deliver them without even having to fight.

2 Chr 20:19 Then some Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood up and praised the LORD, the God of Israel, with very loud voice. 20 Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, Judah and people of Jeru-salem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful." 21 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." 22 As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.

I have heard people preach on this passage and say that it was praise that defeated the enemy. Praise is the fruit of faith. The people were simply responding to what God had said. They were thanking God in advance for the victory. Before it even happened, they were thanking God in advance. Praise is verbalized faith. If you thank God after the fact, that's gratitude. If you thank God before it happens, that's faith.

God defeated the enemy. They turned on each other and destroyed themselves while the Israe-lites looked on.

2 Chr 20:24 When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked to-ward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped.

Here's the question: You know that insurmountable problem in your life? The one that the odds are stacked against you? When are you going to start thanking God for it? After it's all solved? That's gratitude. How about now? How about now? While you're in the problem, while you see it coming at you, thanking God now. That is faith. Thanking God in advance.

2 Chr 20:26 On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, where they praised the LORD. This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah to this day. 27 Then, led by Jehoshaphat, all the men of Judah and Jerusalem returned joyfully to Jerusalem, for the LORD had given them cause to rejoice over their enemies. 28 They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lutes and trumpets. 29 The fear of God came upon all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard how the LORD had fought against the enemies of Israel. 30 And the kingdom of Jehoshaphat was at peace, for his God had given him rest on every side.

BERACAH means BLESSING. Do you have a Valley of Blessing in your life today?

Wouldn't you like that to be true in your life? Living in rest and have peace on every side – the family side, the career side, the financial side, the social side, the physical side, the sexual side – you have peace on every side. When you allow God to solve your problems, it becomes a testimony to unbelievers and the world takes notice when the Christian lives by faith. And God loves to demonstrate His power in those who will just believe Him and expect Him to work in their lives.

After the victory, the people went back to the temple and worshipped. That is what we are doing today. Tomorrow is Thanksgiving. A day we set aside every year to take time and remember God's goodness and provision for us. What are you thankful for today? It is time to count our blessings. It is time to remember God's goodness.

This past weekend we had a chance to go and visit Naomi's parents in Cornwall. My mom went to Ottawa to spend some time with my sister. While they were there they cleaned out her basement and found a bunch of old videos that she brought back and I have been converting to digital.

Naomi and I have been reminded this week of the rich heritage of faith we both have. We have been so blessed. I can stand her this morning and say that I am truly grateful.

I am thankful that God has protected us as a church through this pandemic. I do not know of anyone who is a regular attender of BBC who has died as a result of this virus. Considering that we are a big church, that is a blessing. I am grateful that people have been generous and that we have not suffered financially as a church. I am thankful that people are being careful, but that people are returning, which I think is important.

I am thankful that God holds the future and that we can trust in Him. We can worship knowing that, whatever happens, God is in control. We do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future.

As we come to the communion table today, let's do so remembering the tremendous gift of life that Jesus has purchased for us on the cross. This table is our Valley of Blessing. A reminder of the place that Jesus rescued us from an undefeatable foe. A place where we remember Jehovah Nissi, The Lord our banner.

Back in 1921, a guy called Frederick Banting from the University of Toronto first discovered insulin. On Jan 23, 1922 he walked into a ward at Toronto General Hospital where dozens of children lay comatose, dying from diabetic ketoacidosis. Grieving family members were there by their sides awaiting the inevitable death that would soon come. In one of the most dramatic moments in medical history, Dr. banting began to go from bed to bed, injecting each child with insulin. By the time he got to the last dying child, the first few began awakening from their coma. One by one each child came back to life and the whole ward erupted in joy.

Can you imagine that day? I can. It is what I imagine every time we come to this table of mercy and grace.