

Pastor Matthew Ude
Second Sunday in Advent
December 4, 2022
INI – SDG

Jehovah Nissi: The Lord Is Our Banner

Genesis 12:1-7 Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. ² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

In Exodus chapter 17 shortly after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea the Amalekites attack them. Joshua takes the armies of Israel and goes out to the battle. Moses, Aaron and Hur walk up a mountain. There God tells Moses as long as he holds up his hands over the children of Israel they will win the battle. Of course soon Moses arms grow tired. Aaron and Hur hold up Moses' arms. The Lord gives the Israelites the victory, and Moses builds an Altar and he calls the place Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord is my banner.

Moses had to be a banner of blessing to the people standing with arms lifted up for one day and could not do it without help. But now the Lord will be the banner

for his people. He will hold up His hands over his people to guide them and bless them and give them hope.

The people of Israel lived under the Father's hands of blessing until they departed from it. Because of their sin God sent the Assyrians. In Isaiah 8 it is foretold that the Assyrians would overflow and flood Judah up to their necks. The Assyrians left their land and invaded Israel and Judah but not Jerusalem.

In the midst of this devastation Isaiah says in verse 18:

Isaiah 8:18 Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me! We are for signs [banners] and wonders in Israel From the LORD of hosts, Who dwells in Mount Zion.

In the midst of this devastation the Lord raises a banner/ a sign for the people. A banner which will gather them, lead them out of the devastation and give them salvation. The Lord is a banner to His people.

Simeon makes it clear that this banner is Jesus.

Luke 2:34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against

Jesus comes as a banner for His people.

Here I AM a banner, to guide, to give hope, to gather together, to bless.

In our text God appeared to Abraham to be his banner. He promised to lead him to a new land. He promised to bless him and make his name great. He promised to give hope to the whole earth.

What does a banner do and what is its purpose?

A banner is a guide when you don't know where to go

God calls Abraham to leave everything and go. Where is he to go? God doesn't tell him. He only tells him He will lead him. Abraham through faith follows the Lord. The Lord becomes his banner leading him.

A banner or flag is a great way to guide people. You fly it and people know where to go.

Just last night we were out caroling. I was riding with one group. The driver of our group was following the car ahead of him, but he didn't realize that another car not of our group had snuck in between him and the car he was supposed to be following. We almost made a wrong turn following the wrong car. If we had banners on top of our cars that wouldn't have been a problem.

When I was a runner in high school, they always had flags on the course. Red meant to turn left. Yellow meant to turn right. Blue meant to stay straight.

Abraham didn't know where he was going, but the Lord was his banner to lead him to the promised land.

We don't know where we are going in life. Sometimes people have plans and ideas and goals, but life tends to throw curve balls at us. I certainly had no plans to live in India for nine years or to spend so much time driving down to Madison and back. Yet even though we don't know where we are going we are following Christ. We don't have to fear the path ahead, wherever it goes we are with our Lord.

Christ is our banner. We follow where He leads.

Mark 8:34 "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

We follow the cross even when it leads us through difficult times. We lift high the cross. We pick up the cross calling others to follow after us. We don't know where that path will take us but we know who we are following.

Jehovah-Nissi - The Lord is our banner and we are not lost.

Another good use of a banner is to spread the fame of your name.

God promises to bless Abraham and make his name great.

In the ancient world banners were a way to spread the glory of your name. Every army that flew your banner, whatever they did was attributed to you. Simply by sending out your banner the greatness of your name and reputation could grow. If you were already well known your banner could incite fear in the hearts of your enemies.

The Lord was Abraham's banner. The Lord blessed Abraham and caused his name to be great. So much so that Abraham's name is now known throughout the world. Even those who are not Christians know the name of Abraham.

Abraham fought no wars, founded no cities, was king of no nations, had no influence on political events. He was not a warrior. From an earthly perspective he was a somewhat rich man and that was the sum total of his existence.

Yet the Lord was His banner and the Lord blessed him and made his name great. For that simple reason because the Lord blessed him, he is more well-known than all the kings, warriors, rock stars or any other legend you can think of.

The Lord is our banner to bless us as well.

This is the blessing of the Lord, the lifting up His hands. It was through the lifting up Moses hands that the Lord blessed the Israelites, and they won the battle. It was the lifting up of Christ's hands that brought us the forgiveness of sins. It is the lifting up of your pastors hands through which the Lord blesses you.

If you come up and look at the tree after the service, you will find one ornament which is a hand reaching down from heaven. This is the hand of blessing. It is the only Christian symbol, which is a symbol of the Father. It is the Father's hand reaching down in blessing.

Isaiah 49:22 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, And set up My standard for the peoples; They shall bring your sons in their arms, And your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders;

The Lord holds up His hands in blessing and all the nations of the world flow to it. They carry their sons in their arms and their daughters on their back.

The Lord is our Nissi - He is our banner to bless us.

A banner can also give hope

In the Return of the Kings the people of Gondor in their direst hour, when all hope seems lost see the banner of the king, Aragorn son Arathorn heir of Isildur. The banner flies from the black ships and Aragorn leads the armies of the dead saving the people Gondor.

A banner can certainly be a symbol of hope in the midst of a dark time.

After Abraham left his land and his family, after he arrived in the land God had led him to. God appeared to Abraham. It is easy to skip over the second appearance mentioned in our text, but we forget how easily we ourselves can become discouraged. Having reached a goal we might be left wondering now what. We graduate from college and start working. We buy a house and move in. We get married and start being a family. Suddenly it can feel like a let down.

Abraham arrived and walked through the land. He may have been feeling a little lost. God appeared to Abraham. God was still with Him. The Lord was still His banner to give Him hope.

Psalm 60:3-4 3 You have shown Your people hard things; You have made us drink the wine of confusion. 4 You have given a banner to those who fear You, That it may be displayed because of the truth.

Psalm 60 there talks about how we sometimes have to endure hard times, difficult days. But even in those dark times that Lord has lifted up a banner to bring hope and salvation to the people.

The bronze serpent is also called a nissi, a banner for the people to bring them hope and salvation in a dark and difficult time. They were certainly enduring a difficult time. There were snakes everywhere. People were dying all around them. The Lord lifted up the bronze serpent a banner of salvation for His people.

So also, Jesus has come as a banner of salvation in a dark time. Jesus is our Nissi, our banner to give us hope and salvation.

Psa 20:5 We will rejoice in your salvation, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners!

Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord comes as a banner to His people. He is our banner to lead and guide us when we are lost. He is our banner to bless us through the lifting up of His hands and the lifting up of the pastors' hands. He is a banner to give us hope and salvation in the darkness. He is a banner to gather us together as one people. He was a banner to Abraham and will be to us as well.

Jehovah-Nissi - The Lord is our banner.

Amen