

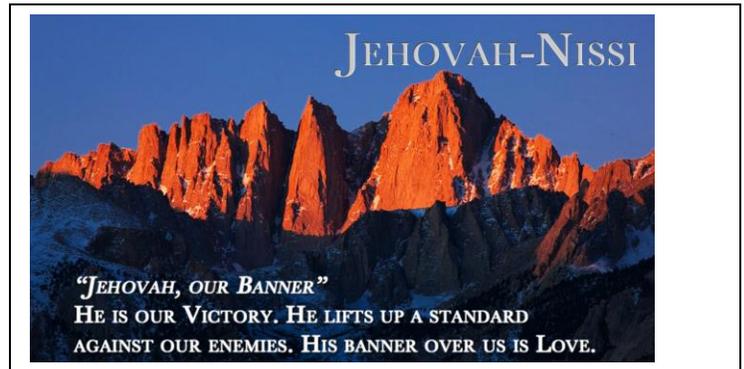
PARTNERS IN PRAYER- “God We Exalt You!”

April 3rd, 2022 Communion & Membership

Dear Prayer Team,

**“And Moses built an altar and named it
‘The LORD is my Banner.’ -Exodus
17:15**

When was the last time that you learned you walked right past something hidden in plain sight? It happened in a Washington DC Metrostation. And I’m sure, had I been there, I would have walked past it without a single glance. In 2007, the *Washington Post* organized an experiment. During the morning rush hour, world-famous violinist Joshua Bell stood dressed like a bum, incognito in the entrance to the L’Enfant Plaza Metro station and played a brilliant classical repertoire for forty-five minutes. It was, as *Post* reporter Gene Weingarten explained, “an experiment in context, perception and priorities- as well as an unblinking assessment of the public taste.”



Joshua Bell routinely fills up concert halls worldwide. Days before, an audience in Boston had paid around \$100 a piece to see him perform. In L’Enfant Plaza, he was playing a Stradivarius made in 1713, reportedly worth \$3.5 million. On that Washington morning, the virtuoso collected exactly \$32.17 from a few by passers who stopped to listen. None seemed to



acknowledge that they knew who he actually was. Most of the one thousand plus commuters who hurried through the station that morning didn’t even slow down. They didn’t pull out cell phones and take pictures or record the event. As I tell you about the incident, I’m not sure if it would have slowed me down either. If I had been rushing through L’Enfant Plaza that morning, I might not have even noticed him. He was hidden in plain sight. (Gene Weingarten, *“Pearls before Breakfast,” Washington Post*, Sunday,

April 8, 2007, pg. 10. And web access.)

As we come to God’s Word Sunday after Sunday, do we run through our days and notice that the Holy Spirit is with us in plain sight for everything we experience? Do we take time and acknowledge Him? Do we value the Person

and the treasure of all the Holy Spirit gives to us? Or do we continue through our Christian lives, and only give cheap amounts of worship to God the Spirit?

Today, the entire service is our message. It is placed into two parts. In the first part, we will look at the essential need of the unseen work of the Holy Spirit as we partake of communion from James 4:5.

In the second part of today's service, we will see the essential need of why we must have the unity of the Body of Christ, the church which the Holy Spirit alone gives to us. As I've heard many say since Covid-19: "A Christian without a church is a Christian in trouble." We will be celebrating and extending the "right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9) to our new members joining today. We will be reminded what a church is, and that it is a "gathering and fellowship of the family of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Spirit." For instance, think about how people today talk about "joining" a church, as if it's a club. Or "driving down to the church," as if it's a building. Or "enjoying church," as if it's a show. What assumptions are at work when most people talk about church in these ways?

Just a few weeks ago, I had a friend who was told by a family who disappeared from his ministry since Covid, "Why pastor, even though we don't come to church anymore, since we do church online, we get more church than we've ever had before in our lives. We actually watch two television programs and listen to several online preachers now through the week. We get so much more church than we ever had gotten in our lives, and we are doing so well." So, do you find anything wrong or disturbing with that statement? If not, you are missing the true meaning of what church is. If church is the "household of God," and the place where God meets His people, then heaven touches down on planet earth through our gathered churches. And if you are not at the gathering, how are you experiencing the church? If church is just something you watch, you really don't know what church is, or why we should be part of it. What is a church? It's a group of people who know they've been loved by Christ and have begun to love one another like that. We are doing church when this group gathers and interacts. And with our actions, worship happens and when you mix yourselves into it in person, that love should make unbelievers out in the world not only hear about Christ in our words, but also see in our actions together, leading them to say, "We want some, too! Can we join?"

So, when was the last time you actually lived out what it means to be a Christian, instead of just saying the words, "I'm a Christian?" James reminds us that faith without actions is dead (James 2:14-26). But as we celebrate communion, we are remembering to exalt God as "Jehovah Nissi," which means "The Lord our Banner!" What is this story about?

We are introduced to the Hebrew name, Jehovah Nissi, in the story of the Israelites and Moses while wandering in the wilderness. Moses was the first one to call upon the Lord Jehovah Nissi in Exodus 17:8-15.

When Israel faced the Amalekites in battle at Rephidim it wasn't with overwhelming force, an experienced army, or the best commanders. It was as a transient tribe of herdsmen escaping slavery in Egypt and travelling uncertainly to a promised land they hadn't seen in over four hundred years. They were trespassers travelling through the lands of fierce fighting peoples. They travelled with women, children, herds, and all their possessions. The battle was for survival, for hope, and for a future.

But they travelled with something else too, something else that no other nation on earth had – a pillar of fire, a cloud of smoke, the very presence of God. Israel did not fight its battles alone. No matter how inexperienced or overmatched they were, they were never the underdogs. No matter how desperate they felt, they were never at a loss. The great General, the perfect Protector, the LORD was with them. So Moses asked Joshua to go to battle.

As the armies lined up to do battle, the men of Israel, under the command of a freshly appointed general named Joshua, could have looked up to a nearby peak and seen three figures – Moses, Aaron, and Hur - standing there overlooking the battle. When the first battle cry sounded and the foes engaged, none of the combatants had time to look. But Moses, the middle of the three figures, raised his hands over the battle, and when he did, Israel began to take the upper hand.

As Joshua fought the Amalekites who wanted to wipe God's people off the face of the earth, Moses was up on the hillside holding up his staff. It was the symbol of power that pushed back the Red Sea in Exodus 15. But, as the day wore on and the sun rose high and hot, Moses tired. He was not a young man and the battle wore on; Moses sagged and dropped his arms to his side. Immediately, the Amalekites rallied and began to press the Israelites. The soldiers with Joshua would look up and see Moses raise the staff and be inspired to fight. It says that when Moses' arms got tired, they would lose the battle as the staff lowered. Aaron and Hur realized what was happening and stepped to Moses' side; they dragged a small boulder close for him to sit on and each took an arm and raised them again over the battle. As they did this, the Israelite fighters rallied to Joshua, found new strength, and the Amalekites felt new fear. So, Aaron and Hur got Moses to sit down. They held up Moses' arms from each side until the battle was won.

I've always used this as a reminder of the importance of our prayer ministry. We are holding up our prayers like Moses held up the staff for our small flock on the Rock to win the spiritual battles for Jesus here along the 611 corridor. We as a prayer ministry must keep the banner of prayer for the Lord held high!

Are we becoming too tired? Are we becoming weary? On this day of communion and membership, let us pray and get our banners to the Lord lifted high! This is an important day, just as it was an important battle for Israel.

Do you know what Moses said after winning the battle? Moses built an altar and called it “The Lord is my Banner.” It was actually a huge stone pile stacked up that represented lifting and exalting God. Moses then said, “Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will deliver...” (vs. 16). Notice that it is almost an exalting reference to prayer.



“Because the hands were lifted up” means prayer. And the New Testament in the book of Hebrews 4:16 tells us “when we lift up prayers to the throne of grace in time of distress for grace and mercy, God will answer (Heb. 4:16).”

The very name used in Scripture is Jehovah Nissi - "the Lord is my Banner". Moses experienced both physical and spiritual victory with the Lord's banner waving over the battle. It was a day to remember, for it was the day God first showed them as a nation that He fought for them, that He led them into battle, that He protected and conquered on their behalf, and

that He was their Banner.

The question arises, though, what does it mean for God to be our banner? When Moses named the altar, “Jehovah Nissi – The LORD is my Banner,” we know it is significant. We know it is for remembrance, but what else is it, and what does it mean for God to be our banner today? Consider how banners are used, and it will begin to reveal some of what this title means.

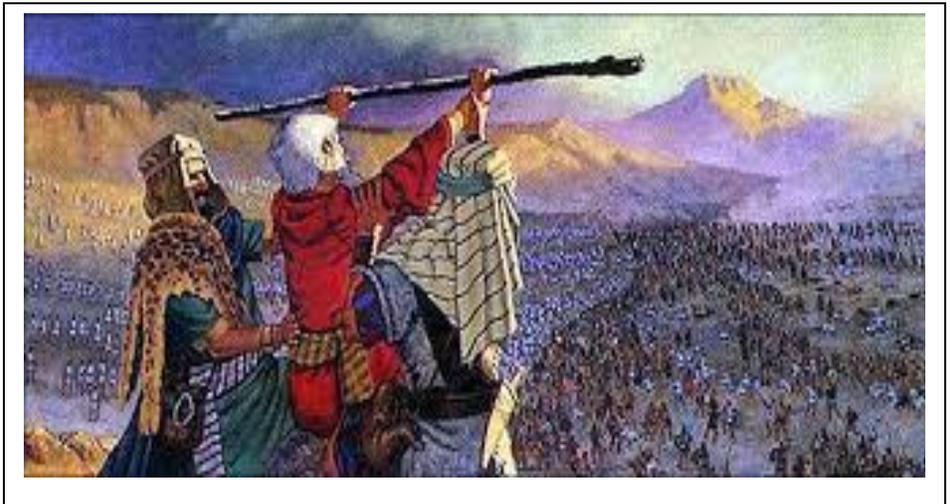
1. Banners are raised to celebrate and honor. They hang from the rafters of arenas honoring champions. They are raised to honor soldiers returning from war. They adorn public places to celebrate occasions or people who deserve honor.
2. Banners are to remember and commemorate. Towns all over America raise banners on certain holidays every year to commemorate something dear to them – a patron, a product, a hero, a tradition, a holy day.
3. Banners are labels and signets. They announce names and images which people can recognize from a great distance. They show the location and identity of a business or event so people can navigate to it.
4. Banners are visible. The whole point of a banner is to be seen, unmistakable and un-ignorable.

5. Banners are for those who raise them. They are an act of celebration, remembrance, or announcement. It shows allegiance. It shows who the victor of the battle is for.

6. Banners are for those who see them. They are an invitation and a gathering place. They summon and call. They attract passersby. As you consider all this, you may see how God is the Banner—Jehovah Nissi—of all who believe, all who are His followers, all who trust Him with the same faith Moses, Aaron, Hur, and Joshua trusted.

As we leave today, ask this question: “How is God our Banner - Jehovah Nissi-still today?” God is our Banner because we live to celebrate and honor His faithfulness to us, shown in myriad ways, from the rising sun to the risen Christ. God is our Banner because we remember all His deeds and His words graciously given to us in Scripture. God is our Banner because He gives us identity, and our label is “God’s children,” because of the saving work of Jesus. God is our Banner because we are His representatives to the world, making Him visible and showing the beauty of His transforming work. God is our Banner because all of this is an invitation, a gravitational pull, a summons, a tug to any who would believe but do not yet know what that means or how to do so.

When Moses built the altar and called it, “The LORD is my Banner,” he was creating a place of remembrance, a celebration of victory, an expression of thanks. He was making a declaration, one that any follower of Jesus can share in today: The LORD is my Banner and we are the LORD’s. It was a declaration not just



of who God is and what He has done, but of who we are as His people. If we pray like this, and if we remember communion like this, and the Holy Spirit enables us and fills us with joy, then we will see victory as we bring in our new members. Let’s not walk past this Sunday, and not see the things in plain sight! While too many of us are saying a lot of things quickly and running on to the next event after church, let’s stop and stand and stare at God’s Word. Let’s lift the banner of prayer and allow it to become fresh and powerful. Beyond all that, our church is where Christ says He is present in a unique way. We would even dare to say that our church is where heaven touches down on earth- where our prayers begin to be answered: “Your kingdom come,

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Here is a great closing quote by prayer devoted pastor Charles Spurgeon, **"As artists give themselves to their models, and poets to their classical pursuits, so must we addict ourselves to prayer!"**

Let us leave with this prayer to Jehovah Nissi:

“We love and praise You our most-High Lord today. You are our Rock, our Fortress, our deliverer, our God who is our Rock in whom we take refuge. You are our Shield, and the song of our salvation! We exalt You as Scriptures proclaims You, Jehovah Nissi- The God who hears the lifting of our prayers and as the ‘Lord our Banner!’ Thank You for Jesus our coming King, but also the heavenly Divine Bridegroom who loves us and is preparing heaven for us to take us home to celebrate the ‘Marriage Supper of the Lamb’. We want to be ready for Your coming. Holy Spirit, thank You for guarding us jealously with a holy protective love! In these last days of confusion and unfaithful compromise, help us to recognize the spiritual warfare around us and to be aware of the enemy’s battle tactics. Give us the strength to fight not in our own might, but by the strength of Your Spirit and while flying Your banner over it all to claim victory. You are our Jehovah Nissi and we thank You for the brothers and sisters in Christ who will raise your banner with us. This victory belongs to You and we lift Your Name high in the face of both physical and spiritual attacks from Satan. You have sovereign authority in all. Thank You that we can follow You with full assurance. In the Name of the Captain of Our Salvation we pray, Amen.”

**With praying arms raised,
Pastor Corvin ⇄**

Quote: “If we think we can do life on our own, we will not take prayer seriously. When something is important to us, we make room for it. Prayer is simply not important to many Christians because it is already an add-on.” ... Paul Miller (A Praying Life, 47-48)

Quote: “There are some people who depend so much upon their reason that they reason away God. Scripture tells us very plainly that God has a dwelling-place. There is no doubt whatever about that. A dwelling-place indicates personality. God’s dwelling-place is in heaven. He has a dwelling-place, and we are going to be inmates of it. Heaven is a certainty.” ... D. L. Moody