

3 Signs of a Strong Church

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[0 : 00] Well, please have a seat and why don't we pray together. Father God, thank you for all the truths that we've already heard and sung about you this morning.

And Father, now as we come to the absolute truth of your word. Father, we pray you would speak to us through it. You would challenge us, you would encourage us.

Father, you would teach us. Father, you would train us in righteousness. And as a result, we might be stronger, more dynamic. Father, we might be more conformed to the image of your son, Jesus.

In whose name we bring these prayers. Amen. So we're continuing in our series in Exodus. We did quite a lot of this straight after Christmas, where we looked at the great escape.

Now I've got this little section of three, where we get from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai. I wonder if you could do me a favor. I wonder if you could think to yourself of maybe the first year you were at university.

[1 : 06] How it felt to be free. Or perhaps you moved out of your house for the first time that you left your parents' house. And you moved into a flat by yourself.

How did it feel? What went through your mind? What opportunities arose? What did freedom feel like?

I was thinking this week that the newfound freedom of university is often a mixed blessing. For the fresh-faced fresher, transition from the comfort and safety of living at home to facing the big bad world is a precarious path fraught with danger.

To escape parental boundaries and embark on a journey of boundless discovery is often a school of hard knocks.

One soon realizes at university the hard way that freedom isn't easy. Freedom isn't easy.

[2 : 15] With greater freedom becomes great responsibility. These responsibilities at university include these things. Nutrition.

You have to feed yourself. Hydration. You have to work out. And find your place in the drinking culture of university.

Budgeting. Suddenly this endless vault of cash reserve called mum and dad is taken away. You have to think about housework.

And whether you're going to do some or not. You have to think about laundry. And amidst all those new responsibilities, you also have to do some studying.

My next door neighbour in halls at university was at university for four weeks. Then he got thrown out. It was quite a remarkable four weeks.

[3 : 18] He spent all his money in four weeks. He contracted glandular fever from womanising. He attended a total of one lecture and that was by mistake.

He just happened to be in the computer lab where his lecture was happening. He completed no coursework. And he used up all three warnings for being drunk and disorderly in halls.

For him, freedom wasn't easy. The liberty that he found came with great danger.

Freedom, you see, isn't easy. For God's people, Israel, freedom wasn't proving easy at all. They'd been liberated from Egypt.

God had stretched out his mighty right hand and had freed them from under the crushing oppression of the Egyptians. He'd shown his power. He'd got them safely through the Red Sea.

[4 : 18] Egypt was a thing of the past and now they were free. But freedom wasn't proving easy. They're on their way to Mount Sinai to receive the law and to worship God.

But the journey, as you saw last week, wasn't proving very smooth. During their journey through the wilderness, God has been testing and teaching them important lessons about their newfound freedom.

Lessons that will eventually land them safely in the promised land, land them safely on Canaan's side. You could almost say that Israel is sitting a module at the wilderness university where God is teaching them about freedom, where God is showing them the kind of people that they need to be.

And they've had three lectures. Lecture one was crossing the Red Sea where God shows his power. Lecture two was what you looked at with Graham last week with Mara and manna, you know, when they couldn't feed themselves and they didn't have any drink and they just grumbled and complained.

And they said, Moses, you're going to kill us. We don't trust you. But God shows his provision by showing, giving them water from the bitterness of Mara, providing quail and manna.

[5 : 35] And then the striking of the rock that poured forth fresh water. Lecture three is today they're in Rephidim. And God is going to show his protection. That all the time they're testing God and all the time God is coming through and showing that he is faithful and trustworthy, that he is for them.

And they can stake their whole life upon him. But isn't it interesting about where this opposition comes from? In lecture one, the opposition was external.

It was the Egyptians bearing down on there. In lecture two, the opposition was internal. It was grumbling from within. And today we're going to see with the Amalekites that they're coming as external forces to test God's people.

The pattern is everywhere. Internal forces and external forces threatening to break up the community of God's people. Testing and trying and showing what God's people are really made of.

You see it in the early church. Internal forces, external forces. In Acts 4, Peter and John are put in prison and are told not to speak about Jesus anymore.

[6 : 53] In Acts 7, Stephen is stoned. Both of those are external opposition. Pressure coming from outside. But in Acts 5, you've got Ananias and Sapphira cheating the church.

Opposition from inside. In Acts 6, you've got the Greek widows, the Hellenistic widows thinking they're not being looked after. And there's opposition from inside. External forces, internal forces, testing and trying to see what God's people are really made of.

Shaping them to see whether they're made of the right stuff. Exactly the same is true for our church. There'll be external forces where Brunsfield Evangelical Church or some of our members or you come into the crosshairs of a hostile world.

There'll be external forces exerted on us which will prove what we're really made of. But there'll be internal forces rising up from within which will also reveal exactly what we're made of.

Exactly whether the gospel is what joins us together, keeps us together and keeps us moving forward in God's will. But perhaps you're here this morning.

[8 : 13] Church is new. What we believe is totally foreign to you. I just want you to think about two things. Number one, where do you turn when things are really tough? When the pressure is exerted in your life, where do you turn?

And number two, I want you to see what a blessing it is to be part of God's people. What a blessing it is. Where do you go when pressure comes? Is it really a blessing to be part of God's people?

So please grab a Bible near you. And we're going to look at Exodus 17 verses 8 to 16. And I want to show you three signs of a strong church.

Three signs of a strong church. Moses writes this. The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Moses said to Joshua, choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands. So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered.

[9 : 18] And Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.

When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up one on one side, one on the other.

So that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. Then the Lord said to Moses, write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it.

Because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Moses built an altar and called it the Lord is my banner. He said, because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord.

The Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation. God's word to us this morning, this amazing incident where the Amalekites attacked God's people at Rephidim.

[10 : 26] I want us to see first that it was a sneak attack. It was a sneak attack. Israel has come to Rephidim. Rephidim means the resting place. But it's proved to be anything but restful.

As they think they're going to die of thirst. And now the Amalekites come. Without any introduction or warning. The Amalekites attack them suddenly and sneakily.

Now who are the Amalekites? They're not introduced here. The Amalekites are the descendants of Amalek. Who is the illegitimate grandson of Esau. Esau has sons.

One of them is called Eliphaz. Eliphaz has three wives and a concubine for good measure. And Eliphaz and Timnah the concubine have a son called Amalek. He is the illegitimate grandson of the unchosen twin brother Esau.

And they hate God's people. They hate God's people. The Amalekites are going to be the arch nemeses of God's people throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

[11 : 32] They're going to be the very epitome of a people that hate God's people and want to see them destroyed. Time and again the Amalekites will come to try and extinguish and exterminate God's people.

And the Amalekites are a nomadic, marauding, warrior nation. They are brutal. They would never sign up to the Geneva Convention. They are opportunistic and they are merciless.

They enjoy skinning people and putting them on a pole. They are absolutely barbarous. They pray on the weak and they live on the plunder that they secure.

Think the Vikings of yesteryear. Or think of ISIS and what they're doing in the Middle East. Utterly brutal. They maraud through huge swathes of territory and enslave.

And terrorize everyone in their path. So the battlefield of Rephidim is a total mismatch. You've got a warrior people, battle hardened, brutal and merciless.

[12 : 44] And they're coming against Israel. The whole body, men, women, children, young and old. They're in a kind of valley so there's no escape.

The Amalekite fox is very much in the Israelite hen house. The Amalekites attack suddenly but also sneakily.

We don't get much detail here but across in Deuteronomy 25, Moses writes this. Moses writes about that in Deuteronomy 25 and at first reading it's like the oddest bit of history in the weirdest place.

The whole thing from Deuteronomy 23 to 15 to the end of 25 is all about the miscellaneous laws that God gave to Israel.

He says things like this. Don't be ash-ridden prostitutes. That's great news. That's great advice for everyone. Don't charge interest. You can eat grapes from your neighbor's vineyard but don't put them in a basket and take them home.

[14 : 05] Don't send husbands to war in the first year of marriage. Don't exploit the workers. Leave scraps or harvest time for the poor and the needy and the widows to glean.

It's also where we get Levirate marriage where if your elder brother dies leaving a wife you have to marry her. I'm sure if you were an Israelite you would take great interest in who your brother was marrying particularly if he was a bit sickly.

Seems like a really weird mishmash of different laws. It seems like a drunk jaw where God puts everything that don't fit anywhere else. But I think when you boil them down all these laws are about harmony and community and unity in the people of Israel.

Don't exploit. Don't charge interest. Don't steal. Don't lick mankind. Don't harm sōz questions. Don't ■■■■. Don't care. Taylor seems like a struggle for pizza. Don't servile. Don't charge interest.

And the infirm, those that were lagging behind. And they snuck up behind and they were utterly brutal to them while you were all marching on ahead. He says these laws I'm giving you are about unity.

[15 : 29] And the problem is when you're not united. It's the weak and the poor and the infirm and those that were lagging behind. That suffered the greatest consequence. Moses uses this event to remind them what happened when they weren't united but were scattered.

When they weren't looking after the weak and those that didn't fit in. They were the ones that got chopped down by the Amalekites. And I think this is the same warning to us.

That I think this event is saying to us that strong churches stick together. Strong churches all stick together. That there's a real unity, a real concern, a real looking out for one another.

It's not some marching on ahead, some lagging behind and some torn. But it's one body moving together. Where everyone shows concern for everyone else.

That Bruntsfield Evangelical Church is to be on a road trip together, not a Centre Parcs holiday. In a road trip everyone travels. All at the same speed. All at the same time.

[16 : 38] To the same destination. At Centre Parcs everyone arrives and does their own little thing. Some people go climbing. Some people go to Starbucks. Some people go to the swimming pool.

Everyone does their own little thing. And the warning is from Exodus 17 is don't go your own. Don't go it on your own. Stay together. If you're strong look after the weak.

If you're weak look to the strong. But together they're to go forward. This isn't, church isn't Darwinian evolution. It's not survival of the fittest.

It's not the dog with the biggest teeth getting the biggest dinners. It's everybody looking out for everyone else. Moses reminds Israel that they're all in this together.

Strong congregations stick together. United in one place as one people. No one left behind like the Marines. So as we look at Brunsfield, are we a strong congregation?

[17 : 38] Are we in this together? Are we in it for each other? And not just what we can gain for ourselves. Do we take Colossians 3 seriously?

Bear with one another. Forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Paul writes to the Ephesians.

Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. With all humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

Are we committed to being a spiritual family? Or just a social gathering? Is this more than just rubbing shoulders with those that are like us on a Sunday?

Strong congregations all stick together. Are we okay with letting the weak fend for themselves? Or are we going to be those that unite?

[18 : 41] Who pull together not along age. Rangers not along interest. Not along gender. Not along gender. Not along those that are cool and those that are maybe less cool. But uniting together purely and simply because of the Lord Jesus.

Strong congregations stick together. 1 Peter describes the adversary, the devil, prowling around like a lion looking for somebody to devour.

And we all remember Natural World with David Attenborough. Where you're on the savannah in Africa and the lions were around and the wildebeest. Who always got attacked? It was the little limpy wildebeest who couldn't quite keep up with everyone else.

It's a real warning. That's the picture we get. That strong congregation stick together. In a few minutes we'll be having church lunch together.

And I wonder what the table arrangement will be. I have fears about what it'll be. Young people on one, dime on another. The slightly elder statesmen on another. And I wonder are we going to be challenged by this word and stick together.

[19 : 51] Maybe make some friends we haven't known before. Maybe invest in some relationships that are maybe drifting. Because strong congregations stick together.

United as one. Strong congregations all stick together. Prime opportunity in about half an hour to see if we can't make that happen.

Second thing we see is a two-pronged strategy. Moses commissions Joshua as the commander of the ground offensive. It's the first mention we get of Joshua in the Bible.

Moses and Aaron and Hur go up to the top of the mountain. They'll overlook the battle and they take with them the staff of gods. Moses. It's a pretty simple narrative.

It's like the grand old Duke of York. When Moses' hands are up, they're up. And when they're down, they're losing. Curious.

[20 : 55] It's a curious thing, isn't it? That a battle would be won by the posture that Moses adopts. But the whole narrative is written to show who the real warrior in the passage is.

The staff of God is the sign of God's power. It was the staff that was the symbol of God's power when he went to war with the Pharaoh. It was the staff of God that was held out over the Red Sea to get it to part.

It was the staff that struck the rock to pour forth water. Water. Nothing in the narrative is mentioned about Joshua's strategy or his swordsmanship. It's all about Moses' hands.

It's all about Moses' posture. When his hands are raised, they win. When his hands are down, they start to lose ground. Many people see Moses as praying.

But I don't think Moses is ever mentioned praying in this piece. I think it's all about Moses' posture. His hands up.

[22 : 00] His hands up. Surrendering and declaring his absolute dependence on God to win it for them. To put his hands in the air and say, God, if you don't turn up, Joshua's going to die.

All the people are going to die. We're going to be cut to shreds by this brutal Amalekite army. Moses, as Israel's mediator, holds up his hands to show their absolute dependence on God.

Declaring their absolute weakness and asking for God's unstoppable strength. Declaring their insufficiency that they might know God's ability.

What Moses is doing is he's staking it all on God. Holding up his hands saying, fight for us. Win for us. Enable us to continue to be your people, not cut to shreds.

Strong congregations stake it all. In utter dependence upon God. Moses stakes it all. He gets tired. He needs help.

[23 : 06] But he stakes it all. And God shows up and wins the day for them. A most unlikely victory. The roles of Aaron and Hur are interesting. That they're up there to support Moses.

They're up there to encourage him as he declares Israel's dependence on God. Now you know that to be true in your own life. Trouble comes.

Illness comes. Unemployment comes. Tragedy comes. And you start off thinking, I'm going to depend on God for this. Going to depend on God's help for this.

And you do it. But it's very tiring. Because God can seem so far away. And like nothing's going to happen. And that's when we need to be Aaron and Hur to each other.

To support those dependent hands. And say, yes, you're right to be dependent on God in this. Yes, you're right to trust him. Yes, he is powerful. He does care. And his timing is perfect.

[24 : 04] Strong congregation stake it all. God wins the day. He overcomes the Amalekites by Moses through Joshua.

They're involved. Up until this point, God has been fighting it all for them. Israel has been very passive. The plagues were his.

The parting of the Red Sea was his. This they're involved in. That their salvation was completely dependent on God's power. But now their sanctification.

Being changed into the people that God wants them to be. Involves their effort. Involves their submission. Involves them declaring their dependence on God.

A strong congregation stakes it all in utter dependence. In absolute reliance on God. And as I look at my own prayer life.

[25 : 04] Because prayer in this day is how we declare our dependence on God. God, we need you. God, we have no power of ourselves. God, we're weak and feeble and frail.

It's through our prayers that we declare our dependence on God. And as I look at my own prayer life. As I look at our corporate prayer life. I worry about how much dependence we have on God.

And how much we just act in arrogance. Doing what we can do to the best of our abilities. Thinking that we have the answers to our own problems. Do you know the prayer meeting on Wednesday was encouraging?

We hit like 20 people. Which is pretty unusual these days. But as we look at a congregation of over 100.

How dependent are we on the Lord? So look at my own prayer life. How dependent am I on the Lord? Saying God, would you use me today? God, would you help me today?

[26 : 01] God, would you strengthen me today? God, would you provide all that I need today? Or do we think that we've got it covered? We've got the ability and all the answers we need.

Jesus is very clear. Apart from me. He can do nothing. And yet we all try. Is the posture of our life. Is the posture of my life.

Is the posture of your life. One of dependence on the Lord. Strong congregation stake it all. Lastly, as we finish.

A glorious banner. Verses 14 and onwards. God says to Moses, write it down. This is the first time in the Bible. That God tells anyone to write something down.

Write it down. Make sure Joshua hears. Make sure Joshua understands. Make sure Joshua is reminded. Well you look at the narrative. And you think if anyone's going to remember.

[26 : 59] It's going to be Joshua. Joshua. But yet it's so important. Because Joshua is going to be Moses' successor. He's going to fight a lot of wars. And it's going to be so important.

That he learns this lesson early. That it won't be Israel's strength. It won't be his military strategy. But it will be the truth. That God fights for them.

Make sure Joshua hears. Drum it into Joshua's head. That God is the warrior of Israel. Who will win the day. And then they build an altar.

And they call it. The Lord is my banner. The Lord is my banner. This is a military symbol. That your banner is where you rally to.

It's the symbol of your army. It carries the insignia of the king. If you're an envoy. Going through dangerous territory. You fly the banner. So that anyone attacks you. Know that they're not just attacking you.

[27 : 56] But they're declaring war on the king. Whose banner you're holding. It's a symbol of security. And might. And power. As it majestically flutters.

In the wind. And this is exactly. What God is. What Moses is declaring about God. That God is my banner. He's the one who protects.

The one who fights. The one who wins. The one who's with us. And for us. And will ensure that no one. Comes against us. It is the sign of a king.

Who fights for his people. The sign that God is on their side. He is their champion. Who will win the day. As we go forward to.

Isaiah 11 verse 10. We read this. Of another banner. In that day. The root of Jesse. Will stand as a banner. For the peoples. The nations will rally to him.

[28 : 52] And his resting place. Will be glorious. He will raise a banner. And gather the exiles of Israel. He will assemble. The scattered people of Judah. From the four corners.

Of the earth. Here. After God wins. Moses says. The Lord is my banner. But Isaiah says. In the future.

A banner will be placed. That will be the ultimate protection. For you. For you. God's people. It will be the ultimate declaration.

That God has won. For us. And that banner still flutters. That banner that was placed in the ground. As the Lord Jesus dies.

Conquering sin. Conquering death. Conquering Satan. Conquering those adversaries. And Jesus won. For us. For us. And that banner still flutters in the wind today.

[29 : 46] And it welcomes everyone. Who will look at it in faith. Saying yes Jesus you won. Who will look at that banner still fluttering. And rally to it for protection.

And power. And victory. And life. The Lord himself raised a banner. An eternal banner. Of glorious victory.

Protection and power. On a hill outside Jerusalem. Where the Lord Jesus fought for each one of us. Will we remain under that banner?

Will we come under that banner? Will we stay in the shadow of that banner? Will we welcome the Lord Jesus. As our captain of salvation. Our commander of salvation.

And we'll stick with him. Knowing that he protects us. He's one for us. Will you come today?

[30 : 43] Say be my banner. Be my protection. Be my life. Be my hope. Strong congregation sticking with Jesus. The rallying point.

That we're constantly going back to. Saying Jesus you won. For me. You won. For us. Rallying to the cross of Jesus.

Our ultimate. Life. And our eternal banner. Trusting in the victory. Reliant on his grace. This week. As we walk around Edinburgh.

We'll see a lot of adverts. Adverts everywhere. Every bus stop. Every shop. Every time you see an advert this week. I just want you to say. The Lord is my banner. The Lord is my banner.

He's the one protecting me. The one helping me. The one guiding me. The one who's one for me. Strong churches stick with Jesus. Stay with Jesus. Here's the three things we've learned.

[31 : 45] Strong churches stay together. It's a real unity. A real concern. A real care for each other. Strong churches. Strong churches. Stake it all. Utterly dependent on God.

Knowing that we have no ability. But God is able. Knowing that we have no power. But all power is his. And strong churches. Stick in with Jesus.

It's like spelling mistake in that one. Strong churches. Stick. In. With Jesus. Let me pray. Father God.

We long not to just be playing at this. We don't want to be a social gathering. Father. We don't want to turn up on a Sunday. To be. Entertained.

We don't want to be a disparate people. Who gather for. Just a short time. At the end of our week. Father. We want to be your people. Who know what it is to be united.

[32 : 43] In your gospel. United. Not around. Age. Or stage. Or gender. Or interest. But united. Purely.

At the cross of your son. Father. We want to be dependent on you. Father. We really want to understand. That apart from you. We can do nothing. So Lord.

We'd stop going it alone. We'd stop trying to work it out ourselves. But we would lean. All of our lives upon you. Stake it all. On your ability.

And your power. Father. That you would be involved. In every area of our lives. Individually. And as a church. And Father. That we would stick in with your son. He would be our life.

He would be our hope. He would be our guide. Our protection. Father. He would be our all in all. And Father. As he's lifted high. As our banner. Lord.

[33 : 41] Would he draw. Everyone to himself. Father. Thank you so much for your son. He unites us. Who equips us. Who won for us.

Father. Bless us. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.