Holding Up Another's Hands

Text: Exodus 17:8-16

I. Introduction

A. Life is certainly tough.

1. There are times when we feel that everything is taking place just as it should.

2. But there are also times when we feel that nothing is taking place as it should, and we feel down, troubled, stressed, frustrated.

B. In these times we are to seek the Father.

1. I do not mean that these are the only times the Father is to be sought. I believe we should always,
everyday, seek the Father, but if we are in continuous communion with Him, I believe we will call out to Him more in our difficult times.

2. Yahweh fights our battles for us, no doubt. It is entirely up to Him whether we win or lose. We see this in the battles of Israel in the OT where in the natural it looked like they wouldn't lose, but because of sin in the camp Yahweh would make sure they were defeated by an army much smaller than they to teach them a lesson.

3. So Yahweh fights our battles, but it is also true that he uses vessels within our lives to fight our battles. He uses people as the means to help us fight our battles. It's like if your praying to Yahweh for groceries and then a family shows up at your house
to give you groceries. You praise Yahweh, because He gave you those groceries, He just used a family to do so.

C. This is what we see in the text before us today. We not only need to be ministered to in our dark times, but we need to be willing vessels and minister to others in their dark times.

1. This doesn't mean that you're going to be the one ministering all the time. You'll have times when you minister, and you'll have times when you are ministered to.

2. This sermon will center in on recognizing that the people of Yahweh need us to help them hold up their hands.
II. Exodus 17:8-16

A. Verses 8-9

1. Rephidim was a location in the desert which the Israelites came to after the giving of the manna in Exodus 16 (and obviously the exodus from Egypt), Exodus 17:1.

2. While in Rephidim they had the "water from the rock" experience (Exodus 17:2-7) and the battle with the Amalekites.

3. The Amalekites were actually descendants of Jacob's twin brother Esau. Amalek being one of Esau's grandchildren (Genesis 36:12).

   a. We must remember here that the descendants of Esau had good blood or good genetics
from Esau's side, his parents being Isaac and Rebekah.

b. However, all of Esau's descendants were the product of his relations with his Canaanite wives. In Genesis 26:34-35 we see that when Esau was 40 years old he took two wives for himself, both referred to as Hittites. The text tells us that these wives made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. The Hittites were descendants from Noah's grandson Canaan (thus Canaanites) who were cursed back in Genesis 9.

4. In verse 9 Moshe speaks to Yehoshua commanding him to select some men from Israel to fight against the Amalekites.
a. This is the first time Yehoshua is mentioned in Scripture.

b. According to the verse he must have been a military leader if not the military leader in Israel.

5. Moshe tells Yehoshua that he will be standing on the hilltop with the staff of Elohim in his hand.

a. This was a simple shepherds staff. Moshe had it with him when he was at the burning bush, and then in Exodus 4:1-5 Yahweh has him throw it on the ground and it turn into a snake. Moshe picks it back up and it returns into a staff.

b. Shortly after this it is called the staff or rod of Elohim (Exodus 4:20). So what
happened was that Yahweh took something that was normal, like a shepherds staff, and miraculously turned it into a vessel of his own, placing Moshe as the human authority over the staff. It is this same staff that Moshe will take with him up on the hilltop during the battle with Amalek.

B. Verse 10

1. Yehoshua obeys the command of Moshe, and Moshe, Aaron, and Hur go up to the top of the hill.

2. Now we know who Moshe is, and we know that Aaron is the older brother of Moshe (Exodus 6:20), the future high priest in Israel (first in line of many Aaronic high priests).
3. Who is Hur? Hur was a leader amongst the Israelites according to Exodus 24:12-14. According to Exodus 31:1-2 Hur was of the tribe of Yehudah.

4. He was important enough a man (in all likelihood an elderly man) in Israel that he was one of two men who went up here on the hilltop with Moshe during battle, and one of two men mentioned in Exodus 24:14.

5. Flavius Josephus speaks of this account in Exodus 17 in his work (Antiquities of the Judahites Book 3, Chapter 2, Section 4) and mentions Hur as the husband of Miriam, Moshe and Aaron sister.
C. Verse 11

1. First off notice that hand is singular in both places here in verse 11. If you're reading the HCSB you'll see a footnote on verse 11 that tells us the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, the Targums, and the Vulgate read "hands" plural. I believe the plural is the correct rendering based not only on these other text, but also on verse 12 which is clearly a reference to both hands. More on verse 12 in a second.

2. Verse 11 tells us that when Moshe would lift his hands Israel would start winning the battle, but when Moshe would put his hands down Amalek would start winning.

   a. Who was making this happen? Yahweh.
b. What was the significance of this?

c. Most theologians believe it is a reference or gesture of prayer to Yahweh. It is interesting that the Aramaic Targum of verse 11 reads, "When Moses held up his hands in prayer, the house of Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hands from prayer, the house of Amalek prevailed."

d. Methodist commentator Adam Clarke writes something about this passage that I believe is worth noting: "We may therefore conclude, that by holding up the hands in this case these two things were intended: 1. That hereby a reference was made to [Yahweh], as the source whence all help and protection must
come, and that on him alone they must depend. 2. That prayer and supplication to [Yahweh] are essentially necessary to their prevalence over all their enemies."

e. In other words Yahweh's causing this to take place during the battle was His way of revealing or showing the Israelites that their faith must always be in His power, and they must always cry out to Him for strength and deliverance and victory. He can cause them to win, and He can cause them to lose. I think that's the point of what was happening.
D. Verse 12

1. Now, in verse 11 we see the omnipotence of Yahweh. He is all powerful. The battle was entirely in His hands. It wasn't the simple gesture of Moshe's hands being up or down, that was only the visible symbol of what Yahweh was doing.

2. In this verse (12) we see the human aspect of what was taking place, and I believe Yahweh was causing this too.

3. Verse 12 says that Moshe's hands grew heavy, as anyone's hands would when they are uplifted for a lengthy period of time.

4. So what happened? Well, the two men who went up with Moshe on the hill top first got a stone for him to sit
upon. This indicates that Moshe was standing for the first part while lifting his hands (with the rod of Elohim in them mind you). So they obtained a stone for Moshe to sit down and rest upon while he continued to lift his hands.

5. But this wasn't all that they did. These two men then got on either side of Moshe and supported his hands so that they remained steady until the sun went down.

6. Yes, Moshe was the man of Elohim. He was chosen. He was special. All this is true, but it didn't mean that he did not need to be helped.

a. Now I ask you, could Yahweh have miraculously given Moshe
the power to keep his hands up?
Sure.

b. But He didn't. Why? I believe it is to teach us another lesson. Not only do we learn from this text that Yahweh is in control, but we also learn that we must help lift up our brother and sisters hands when they get heavy.

c. We are a family. The family of Yahweh. This family is closer than blood ties. Yeshua said those that do Yahweh's will are our true family (Matthew 12:50). We must be willing to uplift, encourage, and build up our family when they are weak. Paul put it like this in Galatians 6:2 "Bear one another's burdens,
and in doing so you fulfill the law of the Messiah."

d. Do you know why Yahweh gives us our gifts and talents? It is not to build our own self up. It is to build up the body of the Messiah. Let me show you something in 1 Corinthians 14:1-5.

e. If we're not using our gifts to build up the body, provide encouragement, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3) then we aren't really using our gifts. Aaron and Hur where sovereignly placed upon the hilltop with Moshe for one reason: to build him up. To be support for him, and we ought to support our fellow brothers and sisters in the Messiah.
7. It is interesting to note the connection between this support that Aaron and Hur gave to Moshe (vs. 12) and the name of the location they were in Rephidim. The name Rephidim means "ballusters" or supports. It is the plural of rephidah used in Song of Solomon 3:10 for a support made of gold.

8. Are we supporting our co-laborers in Yahweh? When we see people getting tired, which is a natural occurrence, do we go up onto the hilltop with them to hold up their hands? Or are just worried about ourselves, and we just continue to neglect the second greatest commandment in the Torah.
E. Verses 13-14

1. Yehoshua defeated = Yehoshua is being used as a part standing for the whole. Remember, Yehoshua selected men from Israel to fight (vs. 9-10). He is used as a representative for Israel, seeing he was a military leader.

2. Yahweh then speaks to Moshe to write down what had happened on a scroll for a reminder. He tells Moshe to recite the occurrence to the children of Israel. It was important for them to remember these lessons from this battle. Yahweh is sovereign. His people need support.

3. One part of what was written was also what we see at the end of verse 14. So much for Yahweh loving everyone equally. Blotting out the
memory of an entire people group from under heaven doesn't sound like love to me. Yahweh wasn't the Mighty One of the Amalekites. He didn't choose them.

F. Verses 15-16

1. So there Moshe built an altar in remembrance as well, and he named that altar "Yahweh-Nissi" which means "Yahweh is my Banner." The word Nissi actually signifies a "flying flag." When victories where won, the winning army would fly their flag at the place of victory as a symbol of victory. Moshe is declaring here that Yahweh is their Victory Banner. Yahweh is the reason they won. Moshe realized that Yahweh was in control of what was happening with his hands.
2. When we look at verse 16 what we find is an obscure sentence in Hebrew.

   a. KJV - For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn

   b. Bishops - For he said: the hande is on the seate of God

   c. Youngs - Because a hand is on the throne of Jah

3. If you'll notice in the HCSB how that the words [my] and [lifted up] are in brackets indicating a translational gloss addition.

4. Some commentators believe the hand towards Yah's throne (and the first LORD is the short form of the name = Yah) is the hand of the Amalekites, and I tend to lean to this
understanding. In other words the meaning is that since the hand of Amalek is lifted up against Yah, Yahweh will be at war with Amalek from generation to generation.

5. Note again the view Yahweh has of Amalek. Verse 16 is related to verse 14. Yahweh doesn't think kindly of the Amalekites.

III. Conclusion

Times get tough. You're not the only one going through a difficult circumstance. Your brother or sister in Yahweh needs your support. Find someone that needs their hands lifted up, and climb upon the hilltop with them, view the battle with them, and then take the gift Yahweh has given you, and support their hands.