

WELCOME

HYMN: *How great thou art*

Narrator The Israelites left the desert, and travelled from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for them to drink. So they started complaining to Moses.

People Give us water to drink.

Moses Why are you complaining to me? Why are you trying to put the Lord to the test?

Narrator But the people were thirsty for water, and they kept on complaining.

People Moses, did you bring us out of Egypt just to let us and our families and our animals die of thirst?

Narrator Then Moses cried out to the Lord.

Moses What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.

Narrator And the Lord answered Moses.

God Go out in front of the people. Take some of the leaders with you, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. When you get to the rock at Mount Sinai, I will be there with you. Strike the rock, and water will pour out for the people to drink.

Narrator So Moses did this while the leaders of the people watched. The people had complained and tested the LORD by asking, “Is the LORD really with us?” So Moses named that place Massah, which means “testing” and Meribah, which means “complaining.”

HYMN: *Dear Lord & Father of mankind*

CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION

HYMN: *Servant King*

Narrator Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Joshua (Leader)

The timing wasn't great, to be honest. For years we'd been slaves in Egypt - and the Egyptians had worked us ruthlessly. There was no hope of escape. No matter how hard we worked, we could never earn our freedom.

In the end, we were so desperate that all we could do was cry out to God for help. And he sent Moses to lead us out of slavery.

When first Moses told us the good news, we were full of joy and worshipped God - but soon the harsh conditions wore us down again, and we grew angry with him for making things even worse. We were so discouraged.

It wasn't until we saw God's signs and wonders that we trusted him enough to obey what he was commanding us to do. Then God led us out of Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea and away towards the land that he's promised us. God freed us! So we put our trust in him, and in Moses his servant.

Well - we did for a while. It must have been three days, at least. But by then we were tired of wandering in the desert, and there wasn't even any

good water to drink. And then later we ran out of food - and then water again. Honestly - we'd thought that when God freed us he'd make *everything* ok. After years of slavery, we were ready for a bit of milk and honey. And yes, ok, God provided everything we needed once we remembered to ask him for it. But really we were at the end of our tethers by then. We were so tired, and so worn down by our captivity.

And then what happened? Just when we thought we'd found a resting place, the Amalekites send their army to attack us! God had freed us - he was leading us towards life in the promised land - life in all its fullness - and yet here was a great force sent out against us - attacking us and getting in the way of all that God had planned for us.

The question was: how much did we really trust him?

HYMN: *Be thou my vision*

Narrator Moses said to Joshua,

Moses Choose some of our men and have them ready to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.

Joshua (Leader)

That staff that Moses had... we all knew that it was special. He'd had it when God spoke to him out of the burning bush, and God gave him the power to turn it into a snake, and back into a staff again, so that we would believe that the Lord of our fathers - the Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - had appeared to him.

It was with him when he left all the security and familiarity of Midian behind, and set out with his family to return to Egypt; and when he told Pharaoh to let our people go.

With that staff, he struck the River Nile, so that the waters turned to blood; and the dust of the ground, so that it became gnats. That was the staff that he stretched out over the streams and canals and ponds, and made frogs come up on the land of Egypt; and over the land, and made the wind bring clouds of locusts; and out towards the sky, and made hail fall and lightning flash.

And that was the staff that Moses raised in one hand, while he stretched out the other over the sea to divide the water so that we could pass through on dry ground. And that was the staff with which he struck the rock, and brought out water for us to drink.

So when he told me to get some of our men ready to fight the Amalekites, because he was going up on the hill with the staff of God in his hands, I knew. I looked in his eyes and I saw the memory of all God's mighty deeds. I looked at his hand, grasping the staff of God, and I knew that he was hanging on to the truth about what God had done for us in the past.

And he didn't even tell me to arm all of our men. Take *some of them*, he said. And I knew then that I might be leading this battle, but the victory was in God's hands.

HYMN: *Great is thy faithfulness*

Narrator So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, 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.

Joshua (Leader)

Down in the valley, the battle raged and there wasn't a minute to think or plan or rest. We just had to keep fighting. We had to stand together and fight, because that was the part that we had to play. We had to be strong and courageous, and trust God for the victory, because that's what he'd told us to do.

But I have to confess that there were times when I despaired. Times when I really thought we were going to lose. Times when all thought of God, and all memories of his mighty deeds, were wiped from my mind by the terror and pain and horror of the battle.

And once, when I thought that at any minute I'd have to give up - run away - or maybe just lay down and die - I glanced up to the top of the hill, and I saw that Moses had lowered his hands. I didn't understand - until I saw him raise them again, and suddenly the battle turned. Suddenly we were winning again. And I remembered what I'd let myself forget: that all we had to do was keep fighting, and keep trusting in God, because whoever won this battle, the victory was going to be his.

HYMN: *Day by day*

Narrator When Moses' hands grew tired, Aaron and Hur took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Then they held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

Joshua (Leader)

We couldn't avoid the battle with the Amalekites. They came out and attacked us, and if we wanted to get to the land that God had promised us - if we really wanted to live life in all its fullness - then we needed to defend the freedom that God had given us.

But on our own, we were hopeless. We were worn out and quarrelsome. We weren't long out of slavery, and we were utterly unprepared for battle.

Those of us fighting the battle could hardly be called warriors. To be honest, we were a bit pathetic: weak, weary and without any real clue what we should be doing. But up on that hill top - they were our prayer warriors: Moses, Aaron and Hur - standing together, supporting each other as they cried out to God on behalf of us all. Without them, the battle would have been lost.

Moses knew that he was going to need Aaron and Hur. Not even a great leader like Moses could have kept praying as he did, without the support of the others - especially when the battle went on and on. He needed the others to keep his hands raised and his eyes fixed on God.

INTERCESSIONS

HYMN: *Who is on the Lord's side*

Narrator And that's how Joshua defeated the Amalekite army.

Joshua (Leader)

We were a bunch of disheartened, weakened, recently released slaves. Even after everything we'd seen God do for us, we still kept grumbling and complaining. Sometimes we even denied that what he'd done for us was worth much at all, and we tried to persuade Moses to let us go back to our old lives.

So it couldn't have been us who defeated that attacking army. We weren't up to it. No - it was God. Ok, we played our part - but it was God who won the victory through us - and he did it because Moses and Aaron and Hur didn't give up. They kept on praying, because they trusted God's promises more than they trusted what *seemed* to be the evidence of their own eyes. They kept their eyes on God, the only source of our hope and salvation.

HYMN: *In Christ Alone*

BLESSING