

Keep Your Hands Up

Exodus 17:8-13

It was the summer of 1996. The city of Atlanta, Georgia was hosting the Olympic Games. Many people, representing countries from all over the world, came to compete in this major event. I was about 12 years old at the time, and I remember spending a great part of the summer watching the Olympics.

From all the sports I watched, I still remember the middleweight boxing match for the gold medal. The reason I still remember this match is because one of the boxers in the match was from Cuba. Actually, this boxer lives in my hometown.

Here is what I remember. The Cuban boxer dominated the fight until the third round. The scoreboard indicated the supremacy of the Cuban fighter over his opponent. The score was 15-5. But something happened. In the third round, Duvergel, the Cuban boxer, was knocked out by his opponent. I don't know if you like boxing (forgive me if you don't), but I have a footage to show you what happened.

The reason I showed you this video is because in later analysis, experts and commentators pointed out deficiencies of the Cuban boxer that prevented him from getting the gold medal. One of his big mistakes was this, "he did not keep his hands up." Some people at the time speculated that if Duvergel would've kept his guard up, he would've won the Olympic title. Anyway, he didn't. And, one of the lessons I've learned from this is, in life as in boxing, we need to keep our hands up.

In the Bible, we find examples of what happens when we keep our hands up. You may remember that the Hebrew people left Egypt, and Pharaoh regretted his decision of letting them go. So, the ruler went after the Israelites. When Pharaoh had almost reached the Hebrews, God gave the

following command to Moses: *“Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.” Exodus 14:16 NIV*

We all know what happened. The Red Sea was divided, and God saved the Israelites. God told Moses, “Lift up your hands and I will bring victory and salvation. Keep your hands up because I am defending and delivering you from this situation.”

We just read a fascinating story of victory and salvation. The Scripture reading for this morning narrates the time when the Hebrew people were wandering in the wilderness, and the Amalekites decided to attack Israel. This is perhaps the most difficult battle the Israelites had to fight. I am saying this because, if you take the context into consideration, you will know that the Hebrews had been slaves for 450 years and did not have an army. In contrast to their situation, the Amalekites had a well-trained and very violent military. The Hebrews knew very well that they could not pull this one off by themselves.

Here is where Moses came up with the strategy of sending Joshua with some men to the battlefield while he (Moses), Aaron and Hur went to the top of a hill to keep their hands up, while holding the staff of God. This is a very interesting strategy, because nowhere in the text do we see God commanding Moses to do this. Why is Moses doing it?

Perhaps Moses remembered that the last time they faced a powerful army, God delivered them as he (Moses) raised the staff towards heaven. Most likely, Moses was calling upon God for help; just like a child who calls for the help of one of the parents as he/she raises their hands to them. Actually, lifting hands was a symbol of supplication. So, when we see Moses standing on top of the hill with hands up, we can interpret such an act as Moses saying to God: “The only way to victory is you lifting us up.”

You and I may not be facing the Amalekites, but there are situations we face that are greater than our strength, intellect, and even willpower. It does not matter what you are fighting. Victory does not depend on how weak or strong you or the situations you face seem. So, it does not matter if your struggle is against a hard habit to break, a disease, or the consequences of bad choices that are made. Keep your hands up as a sign that you are calling upon the Lord as your deliverer. Victory belongs to God, and the Lord will carry you through the battle.

What does it meant to keep hands up in our everyday life?

Keeping hands up also means honoring your appointment with the doctor, the therapist, the advisor, your accountability partner. It means putting into practice wise advice; paying attention to God's definition of who you are rather than taking note of unhelpful criticism. Keeping hands up means praying, hoping, loving, and being faithful, even in the midst of unfavorable situations. It means knocking on doors, being persistent, and seeking ways to influence others for good.

Keeping hands up also means seeking help from others. I want you to notice that Moses took with him two more guys to be his helpers. The truth of the matter is that we all need help because it is really hard to keep hands up with only our own strength.

Now, let me talk to those who may be having a peaceful moment in their lives. We all are called to keep hands up regardless of the circumstances we face. Sometimes you will hold the staff; however, other times you will hold the arms of those who sustain the staff. Part of loving our neighbors as ourselves is embracing their struggles as our own. We are called to keep our own hands up. And, we are also called to help others keep their hands up.

Keeping hands up is not only for leaders; this is for everyone. You don't need to be the pastor of the church to help sustain the church. You don't need to own a business to be a good worker. You don't need to be under the spotlight to make the decision to give your best. Not everyone is going to carry the rod in their hands, but we all can keep the rod lifted high.

What I am trying to say is that we cannot all be Moses, but we all have the possibility to take the place of Aaron and Hur. Leaders keep hands on high not by themselves, but with the help of people willing to carry the load along the way.

It is no secret that the world needs people who support, give strength and sustain the weary arms. I do believe God has placed us here on earth to be channels of blessings. We are here to be contributors, not only consumers. God wants us to collaborate, assist, and provide a word of encouragement, offer a prayer, and at times just be a presence to others. The thing is that we all need to keep our arms raised because our input will contribute to the healing and deliverance God will bring to all of us.

The Prophet Isaiah wrote: *Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come... he will come to save you."* **Isaiah 35:3 NIV**

Church, God has given us the mission to strengthen weak arms. God has assigned us a place in this battle. We are called to fight the good fight of faith. We are called to sustain and support.

Remember, when we keep our hands up, we are calling upon the name of the One who brings victory to our lives and the lives of those around us. When we raise our hands, God comes to our defense and gives us freedom.

Let me share with you the end of this chapter in the history of the Hebrew people.

*So Joshua defeated the Amalekites in this battle. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write about this battle in a book so people will remember...” Then Moses built an altar. He named it The Lord is my Banner. Moses said, “**I lifted my hands toward the Lord’s throne. The Lord will fight against the Amalekites forever.**” Exodus 17:13-16 (International Children’s Bible)*

Church, as long as we lift our hands toward the throne of God, the Lord, our Banner, will go in front of us, opening the way and fighting each of our battles forever. Let us keep our hands up.