

Yahweh Tsebaoth: I Am the Lord Almighty

By Bobby Schuller

Well, God isn't done with you yet. Amen? God isn't done with you. And if you're here today, that's what I want you to know. That God not only is not done with you, but God is fighting for you, and God wants you to stay in the fight.

We are in a series about the names of God where we're studying all these attributes of God that are so much a part of God that He ascribes these things to His own name. And the one we're studying today is often, in my opinion, mis-translated. Sometimes is Lord Almighty, which is true. Sometimes translated as Lord of Hosts, as if anybody knows what a host is. What's a host? Well, yes, you know because it's an army. I saw one say Lord of all. The translation for today is Lord of Armies. And I think translators don't like using that translation because, well it does sound kind of violent and uncivilized, doesn't it. It's one of the most common names of God. It's used over 250 times in the Old Testament. And it's an important one. And it's one we need to study.

Yahweh Tsebaoth is Lord of Armies. And the principle of the Lord of Armies is that the Lord who is also the Lord of peace will bring an end to the violence in the world, and yet it also acknowledges that all of us are caught in a fight right now. That there is this sort of big story we're all a part of, this fight between good and evil. And for you today, God wants you to know, whatever it is you're going through, and I'm sure

you're going through a lot, that God is fighting for you. And God is so good. And He hasn't left you, He hasn't abandoned you, He's fighting for you. You're His beloved sons and daughters.

There is a great story, one of my favorite writings from C.S. Lewis, it's probably everybody's favorite writings, although he wrote a lot of theological books, his most famous works are his novels and his most famous novel is called *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And in this book, he really paints a beautiful picture of the Christian worldview. In this book, there are these children who wander through a closet. I think it's an uncle's house or something. It's a wardrobe. And in the back of the wardrobe is an opening to a magical world. And this world is being ruled by an evil winter queen. And she has turned the whole land into a land of winter for all time, so there's snow and nothing's growing. And there's talking animals. And they talk about a day that's going to come in which the old king, Aslan, is going to return and with him he's going to bring spring. So a talking beaver is explaining this to one of the children named Susan. And they're talking about this Aslan character, who by the way is an allegory for Jesus.

And they are talking about this Aslan figure and the beaver says 'he's a mighty lion.' And Susan says 'oh, I thought as a king he would have been a man.' And he says 'oh no, he's a big fearsome lion.' Sort of scared, Susan says 'well is he safe?' And the beaver says, 'absolutely not. He's a lion. He's dangerous but he's very good.' He's good. He's on the

side of good. This is the Bobby Schuller version. He's nothing but good. He's only good all the time, and nothing but good. But he's dangerous. And he's tough, and he's strong.

So we talk a lot in this church about this good God who is loving and gentle and gracious and kind and forgiving, but He's also strong, and He's also wrathful, and He's very dangerous, but He's good and He is fighting for you. He's fighting for you. How do we reconcile a God of love with a God of Armies? Because sometimes love is something you fight for, especially in a world that is torn in the way that ours is: confused, broken, hurting. And all the evil that we see in our world and on the news, we know that there is a strong God who is fighting on your behalf, and you can trust Him. And I want you to know that as God is fighting for you, He's going to ask you to fight too, and to not give up, and to not cash in and to not quit. You're going to sing a song of victory when this is all done, and I'm going to be there with you, and I can't wait to see it happen.

So this name, the Lord of Armies, is so common in the bible, but the first place we see it is not where you think it would be. You'd think it would be around some ancient battlefield or something. But it's not. It's around a young woman who can't get pregnant, and her name is Hannah. It's from 1st Samuel 1, and it goes a little something like this: there is a man, he's a Levite, and that's important because the Levites are the family of priests. And he had two wives. In the ancient days,

polygamy was common. The bible doesn't really look kindly on polygamy. All the stories, which is included in the Old Testament, you see brokenness, and this is one of those stories.

He has two wives. One wife's name is Peninnah. If you're looking for baby names - Peninnah. And the other wife's name is Hannah. And these two wives both share the same husband and the bible says every single year they would go to Shiloh. Shiloh was the place of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the center of Jewish worship. It had been there for years. And at the center of the tabernacle is the Ark of the Covenant. It's the throne of God. Its golden and I know you know what it looks like because I know you have seen Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones. It looks just like that. And it is right in the middle, and inside this box are the two tablets of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Sinai.

And so this tabernacle is built around this very holy, very dangerous thing that is supposed to be both theologically and actually the throne of God, that God is actually present on and around this object. And so there's a lot of ceremony around this ark.

This man, Elkanah and his two wives and their family would travel to the tabernacle every year to make a peace offering and make a sin offering, and it was something very normal for Levites to do. But there's something sad happening. Of the two women, Peninnah has lots of kids and Hannah has none. And every year they would sit around a table in

the city and they would eat this feast together celebrating the offering.

And picture this: you would have Elkanah, the husband, Peninnah, one of the wives, all her kids around the table, and Hannah all by herself.

The story goes that Elkanah felt so bad for his wife that she couldn't have a baby that in order to make her feel better, he'd give her a double portion; extra meat, extra wine, trying to make her feel better. But Peninnah would come around and poke Hannah all the time, and make fun of her, and mock her: you're never going to have a kid. You're a barren wife. You're worthless to our husband.

So here's Hannah wanting desperately to have a child, and this proud, mean-spirited, I don't know what you would even call it, a co-wife? Poking, prodding, harming, hurting. And every year this same thing happens. They go to Shiloh, they make an offering, they have a feast. And there's Elkanah, Peninnah, all her kids, and Hannah. And Peninnah mocks and ridicules Hannah because she can't have a kid. And one year, the same thing happens, Elkanah gives her extra food, and she just sits there and stares at it and can't eat it and can't eat anything.

And the night goes on and everybody's having a good time, and they're making jokes, and they're drinking, and they're having fun, and Hannah sits at the table looking at her food, lonely, angry, depressed. And one by one, members of the table begin to leave the table and they go out as the night goes on, and they leave. Finally, Elkanah is there and he says 'darling, why aren't you eating your food?' She just looks at him

with teary eyes. She doesn't say anything. He already knows what she's feeling. And he says 'am I not better to you than ten sons?' You know I always think in this part that probably Elkanah and Hannah were very close. They were probably deeply in love. And maybe Peninnah didn't have that love. Maybe some of her ridicule came from a place that, well she was able to have sons, but she never had her husband's heart. I digress. This is just me. I don't know. The Bible doesn't say that.

So there is Elkanah and Hannah. He says 'am I not better than ten sons?' And she just looks at him with teary eyes, and he walks out and there is Hannah sitting at a table alone, disappointed again. All alone. And finally she stands up, and she begins to walk up that hill towards that tabernacle and towards that Ark, and she falls on her knees and she says this name for God the very first time in the Bible – 'Lord of Armies! Remember me! Give me a son! And if you give me a son, I will give him to you and he will serve you all the days of his life. I make this oath.' And then she begins to just wail and weep and cry. And the Bible says on and on, she goes on, just heaving in her grief and pain and there's just this incredible pouring out of humanness, of her heart before the throne of God.

So she's praying for hours. She's been doing this for so long, just wailing before the throne of God. Eli comes around and all he sees is just a woman, her face covered in tears, just mouth moving. You can't hear anything she's saying anymore. And condescendingly he says, 'woman,

you've had way too much to drink. You need to go to bed, and stop drinking right now.' That's literally what it says.

She looks up at him, dignified, and she says, 'do not think me a worthless woman. My prayer has been prompted by deep sorrow and misery.' Eli is overcome with emotion for her. He knows why she's crying. He knows the family well. They come every year. And he prays over her, 'May God give you this prayer. May He answer this prayer and give you a son.'

After this, something changes in Hannah. It's like what Aristotle called catharsis. Just something happened in the motion of hours of wailing and praying, not bottling it up, not pretending like everything's okay, not putting on a smile, but wailing, crying and weeping before the throne of God gave her, I wouldn't call it joy, but it did give her a sense of freedom.

And she walked down from that hill and the Bible says she ate that food, and she drank that wine, and it says she was no longer downcast. And she went home with her husband, back to where they were, and she made love to her husband, and she became pregnant and God answered her prayer. And years later, she weaned this boy, little boy and she decides all right, it's time to fulfill this vow. And she and her husband and this boy Samuel walk back to Eli at that tabernacle, and she says 'this boy will serve the Lord all the days of his life for the Lord of Armies remembered me and heard my prayer.'

I just want to pause for a minute. I want you to know that it is good to be emotional. I went through a long period of my life where I believed that I don't know if it was my view of masculinity, or my own wounds in my life, but that I had to be strong, and I had to box out people from what I was feeling. And to be honest, I did that long enough that I wasn't feeling anything. And part of my journey as a believer was learning, not only the power of joy and enthusiasm and positivity, but the power of vulnerability, grief, weeping, and imploring the God of Armies. And I found that you can't have one without the other. It's the Bible that teaches us this; that when we go through something difficult none of us are strong enough to go through it alone. We need a big lion to go with us. And frankly, we need our friends. We cannot do it alone. Being emotional, weeping, grieving, being vulnerable, bleeding from your soul is not weak, it's strong. It takes courage to be truly you just as you are around people that respect you and love you. Why? Because you're so afraid of losing that respect. You're so afraid of being taken advantage of. You don't have to be afraid. It's good to bring your fears and your anger, even, before God. You know it's okay to be angry at God? He teaches us that when we feel angry or disappointed, that we should share that with Him and He'll meet us there.

She brings this boy Samuel back to the mountain, and she dedicates him, and then she sings this famous song, and I love this. The Bible is full of victory songs. Mary sang one, Moses sang one, Hannah

sings one, and through these stories, you see that the saints.. it's not easy what they do. They go through battle after battle. They lose people they love, they go through sickness, they face all the difficult things of life, but yet when they get to the end, they look back and they understand and they sing a song of victory. And you're going to sing a song of victory. Your song is going to be so beautiful to the ears of the Lord.

And Hannah sings this song, it's in Samuel chapter 2, but the gist is what almost every victory song in the Old Testament says, and it's these two things. One – God opposes the proud and exalts the humble. And two – despite human evil, God is at work. Despite human evil, God is fighting for you. And when you cross that finish line, you're going to see the ways that He never gave up on you, never abandoned you, never left you alone. He's fighting for you because He loves you; because you're His beloved child. Parents fight for their children and God fights for you.

It's good to grieve, it's good to feel, it's good to be emotional. When we grieve and we cry, sometimes we allow that cry to be sort of like a war cry. Do you know what I mean by that? Like we turn our weeping and wailing to saying.. to going from sadness into no – I am going to fight and I'm not going to give up. And I'm going to endure, and I'm not going to quit cause that's what the enemy wants us to do. And it's at that point that the Lord of Armies says, come on, let's go and let's fight together.

And she was like sitting there in the green room like cooling herself, and just so sweet and loving people. She's a famous musician now, probably one of the most important gospel musicians in America.

And she told her story. And in her story years ago, she's young, but she was even younger then, her best friend got cancer. And she was praying for her friend every day. And they were believing, as you should, by faith, that God would heal her and bring her through. Her friend was pregnant, and had a son, and the son was healthy and happy and her husband and this baby now are a family, and Mandisa was just praying for her best friend to get through this. And a year later, her friend died.

And for her, she'd seen so many victories in her life. She'd seen God do so many good things that she couldn't theologically reconcile how could this happen? We prayed, we poured our heart out to God. And yet the prayer was unanswered. God, where are you? She fell into a legit deep dark depression. A hole she was stuck in for three years. She says she gained 150 pounds. She didn't get out of the house. And yet there she was. I wrote it down because it was so profound to me. She said, and very simple, 'I wanted my friend to live and I was mad at God.' And because her whole life was built around God, she hadn't really been vulnerable about what she was going through with others. She just bottled it in and just disappeared. She was a good friend to many people, and they'd reach out to her, but she just wouldn't get out of the house and she wouldn't leave.

Well one of the first times she really got out was when the movie “War Room.” Do you remember that? It was a Christian movie, but it was in the theaters, came out, and it was about a woman who prays and Mandisa’s song, her Grammy winning song, I think it’s called “Overcomer,” was at the end when the culminating part of the story, the lady who’s praying, gets her prayer answered and then Mandisa’s song is sung over that. And she says as she was watching in that movie theater, she felt angry because she didn’t get her prayer answered, and she felt taken advantage of that they would use my song. In this story, she gets her prayer answered, but I didn’t get my prayer answered.

She got up out of that theater and she began to walk towards her car, frustrated and angry, and when she got there, her car was covered in post-it notes. And on every post-it note was a letter, a word of encouragement from a friend: Mandisa, we love you. Mandisa, we miss you. Mandisa, we want you. And she thought, what is going on here? And eight of her closest friends, when she was looking at her car, came and surrounded her and they said we did this because we miss you. They said Mandisa, we love you just as you are, but we love you too much to leave you here this way.

It’s an amazing story. You see what had happened is they knew she was going to go to the movie, they just didn’t know when she was going. I didn’t quite understand this part of the interview, but they waited there all day because they didn’t want to miss her. And so when

they saw her park and go into the movie, they started writing these notes and they just did one note and all of a sudden the car was slathered in post-it notes. And that was the thing that brought her out was her being able to look at her friends and say guys, I'm mad at God. Guys, I don't understand this. I don't understand why God didn't answer this prayer. I don't understand why my best friend died. And it was that, the vulnerability. It's not even like she got the answer to that question, but rather, she got a move of the Holy Spirit and a strength that came from being honest about how she felt. From not saying to herself I have to fight this alone, I have to be strong, I have to hide it all. Instead, she said to her friends, I'm angry, I'm frustrated, I'm mad, and that was a very Christian thing to do.

You know when you read the Psalms, most of the Psalms are Psalms of lament. I think it's like well if they're broken up into four categories, the largest category is lament, and I want to say there's 60 or 65 Psalms of lament. Of David just saying God, where are you. God, why have you abandoned me. God, why have you forgotten me. And in the Jewish liturgy, in the old liturgy, they had to sing these songs, even if they were having a great day. Even if they just won the lottery, they had to be like God, why have you abandoned me. Why? Because when things are going really good, and then they drop off a cliff, there are a million and one reasons why we don't want to tell anybody that life is not going

well, and that's one of the worst things we can do. That's when we get isolated, and lonely.

And so if you're here today, I want you to know that God is strong and He's fighting for you. He is the Lord of Armies, and He loves you, and He will never give up on you. He will never stop fighting for you. He will never quit on you. You are His beloved sons and daughters, and whatever battle you're fighting, God is fighting it with you. You may not see it or know it, but He is and He will get you through, and you will have a song of victory. And you will understand someday. And you'll be able to tell others someday who are going through the same thing they're going to get through, too.

My grandpa said it best – life's not fair, but God is good. And that Mandisa story, when I was interviewing her, it was so awesome because in the end, she sang this new song about coming out of the dark. Powerful song honoring and loving God for pulling her out of this depression. And she played this amazing song with the band, and then what we found out later, all those musicians who were playing with her in the band, there were two there, they were the friends that put the post-it notes on the car. They sang the victory song with her.

And you have friends and family in your life that when you get through whatever it is you're going through, they're going to be there with you, singing with you, and so is God, and so am I. We're going to celebrate with you when you cross that finish line. God isn't done with

you. He's not done with you. The greater your pain, the greater your purpose. God will never let you suffer without some ultimate reason. It's not that God sends the suffering, but when we go through the suffering of life, He'll pull us through and it'll make us stronger, better, smarter, and more joyful because of it, and that's the truth. Amen.