

Jesus' Sacrifice; Our Victory

Meditation #1

No Sacrifice; no victory. I wish that line was attached to some great general; it feels like it should be. I know it as a line from a movie. Fictional phrase or not, there is truth to it. Victory is very rarely, if ever, just handed to you. You must work for it, give something up to achieve it. Victory comes at a cost.

What victory are we talking about? What battle is being fought that we need to win? I'm not talking about troops being deployed to Afghanistan. I'm talking about a conflict that we are currently engaged in. It is a battle for our souls.

Satan and his army of evil angels want nothing more than to lay waste to you. He wants you to lose, to be destroyed. He wants you to suffer the agony of defeat all the days of your life. He wants to drag you to hell. He's been doing it for millennia, fighting with the same tactics. He is crafty, strategic. He knows our weak spots and hits them time and again. He fights because he wants us to die. His satisfaction comes at our destruction.

There is another enemy, an army of people who want you to give up on God. It's a world of influence, of friends, of coworkers, of family who tell you that you are on the losing side by following God. Why keep clinging to that ancient, hokey religion. He can't protect you. He can't save you.

A third enemy is ourselves, the doubt that conflicts our loyalty, the voice that buys into what the world is saying to us about God. The other side looks formidable, scary. They look like they are winning as it seems like there are less and less Christians like me around. Maybe I should give up. Maybe I should join them.

You can't run away from this battle. You can't draft dodge it. You are involved in this fight whether you want to be or not. We all are. You are on one side or the other. There is no middle ground.

For the Christian, we have a leader for this great conflict in which we are engaged. We have a general who does more than say pithy, memorable lines. He is not the kind of general that gives you a briefing and then sends you to the front lines as he stays back in his heavily armored bunker. He doesn't even ride towards the back of the assault. He is on the front lines. He is leading the charge. Those stars do not keep him from the front, the heaviest fighting. Like the kings of old, he comes out to lead us in battle. He is the first to clash steel. He shouts with a battle cry to lift our spirits, to get us ready to follow him into this battle. He leads the charge to victory. This is Jesus, our great general.

A reading from Isaiah chapter 42, verse 13: **"The LORD will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies."**

We sing **Hymn 431, stanza 2.**

Meditation #2

There is a scene in recent origin movie of Captain America where Colonel Phillips, played by Tommy Lee Jones, runs a litany of reasons why a 90 lb. asthmatic Steve Rogers should not be the primary candidate to be experimented on to become Captain America. When the head scientist refuses to pick a physically stronger candidate, he cites the reason why is because the other stronger candidate is a bully. Colonel Phillips retorts, "You don't win wars with niceness, Doctor." Then he picks up a dummy grenade, pulls the pin, says, "You win war with guts," and throws the grenade into the group of soldiers training. Our protagonist, Steve Rogers, the 90 lb. asthmatic, jumps on the grenade while the rest of the soldiers scatter. Steve Rogers had the guts to fall on a grenade to save his fellow troops, to win wars. He had the guts to be Captain America.

Is there anything more benevolent than sacrificing yourself to save another? That's the stuff that heroes are made of. We have a general who is willing to fall on a grenade for us. In fact, it's what he set out to do.

Jesus set out with the notion that he would sacrifice himself for others. He would show the greatest love by doing so, because love is all about what you do for other people. Not about how you feel about them, not about fitting them into your schedule. Love is what you do for others. Jesus' choice was to sacrifice himself and show that greatest love.

A reading from John chapter 15 verse 13, words of Jesus: **"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."**

We sing **Hymn 431, stanza 3.**

Meditation #3

Falling on a grenade, sacrificing yourself, this is a grand, benevolent gesture, but if every general did that, who would lead us into battle? Who would strategize? Who would lead us to victory? Yes, I want my leader to put my life ahead of theirs, but I don't want a kamikaze for a general.

To be a kamikaze was considered a great honor by the Japanese. As they were losing the war in the Pacific, they went to the extreme tactic of rigging their planes with explosives and having pilots purposefully crash them into Allied battleships and aircraft carriers to cause more extensive and crippling damage than could be done by conventional bombs and missiles. They chose to die to try to gain victory for their country. They were honored for their sacrifice.

Men can choose to die. They can choose to fall on a grenade. They can choose to be a kamikaze. Why do they do that? Why do they choose to sacrifice themselves in that way? It's often for honor, for helping out others. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die, for a good cause someone may sacrifice themselves.

Jesus choose to willingly sacrifice himself for us. He did not do this because of national pride or because he had a band of brothers that he was fighting for. We heard, "Grenade!" and we scattered. We wanted to save ourselves. If anything, we held Jesus back, undermined him, collaborated with the enemy, worked to thwart the victory he was trying to achieve. We had not earned his trust. We had not earned comradery with him. We tried to kill him. We wrote him off. We didn't deserve to win, didn't deserve to have anyone sacrifice himself for us. Our general did something that no one in their right mind would do. He sacrificed himself while we were his enemies so that we would be victorious.

A reading from Romans chapter 5 verses 6 to 11: **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."**

We sing **Hymn 431, stanza 4.**

Meditation #4

There's a part of the kamikaze mindset that you can appreciate. These pilots were willing to give up their lives to win a war they were obviously losing. They refused to give up. They did all that they could to still gain victory. But in the end they still lost. What good had the kamikaze pilot's sacrifice gained? What good is it for the general to sacrifice himself for troops that are his enemies, not his friends, not his loyal soldiers? If he dies, aren't his soldiers doomed with no leadership?

This is where our general is different. He freely chose to sacrifice his life. No one took it from him. It wasn't just a reaction as if someone had unexpectedly thrown a grenade in your fox hole. It wasn't a last resort, as if all other options had been expended. Jesus, our great general, had planned to sacrifice himself. It was the only way to win, only way to save us from God's wrath, only way to turn us from being his enemies to be saved and have victory. He planned not only to sacrifice himself, but also to take his life back up again. Our general would not stay dead. He would make the ultimate sacrifice, but then he would take his life back up in the victory he won for all humankind.

A reading from John 10:17-18: **"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."**

We sing **Hymn 431, stanza 5.**

Meditation #5

In this spiritual warfare, there are many casualties on both sides. Many wicked people have died fighting against God. Many believers have died fighting for the name of God. The death toll is catastrophic. but victory has been achieved.

Jesus Christ, our great general, not only sacrificed himself for us, but he also took his life back up again as he rose from the dead on that very first Easter Sunday. We have victory over the devil and over death itself because of his sacrifice. This victory is not just for us, it is also for all those who died in the name of our great general, in the name of the Lord. They are celebrating this victory as Saints Triumphant, already having received their heavenly home. They now know a life where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. The old order of things has passed away because Jesus is victorious. His sacrifice is our victory over the devil and his army, over the world that wants us to defect to the army of darkness, over our sinful nature that wants us to defect to the dark side. He defeated death with his life. Jesus' sacrifice is our victory.

A reading from Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 5: **Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Amen.**

We sing **Hymn 431, stanza 6.**

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