

Onward Christian Soldiers

“It is enough!” The mighty prophet of God now sits alone in the shade of a juniper tree a day’s journey into the wilderness of Beer-sheba, far from the danger that wicked Jezebel posed, and proclaims to his God that he is finished. He is no longer able to battle on and makes an ardent plea that the Lord now take away his life. In effect, he requests that his battle be ended. He is able to fight on no more.

Yes, this mighty prophet is none other than Elijah himself. The man called of God to prophesy to his people Israel and through whom God would turn them back to himself. This was the man who boldly proclaimed to wicked king Ahab that the land would see neither dew nor rain until he spoke thus. This was the man who experienced first hand the providential care of his heavenly Father when the Lord fed him by the ravens and later when he miraculously caused the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil to remain. This was the man who earnestly entreated the Lord to restore to life again the son of the widow and who witnessed the amazing power of God in his raising the lad from the dead. This was the man who through the grace of God challenged Ahab and all those who worshipped Baal to see once and for all whether Baal was god or whether Jehovah was God.

This great man now lies at the foot of this small tree, probably in the only bit of shade he could find, and asks that the Lord declare his battle to be ended. “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (I Kings 19:4).

How often have you and I felt this same way? How often have we not so desired that the battle in which we find ourselves be finished? If only we could lay down those weapons of war, remove the heavy armor bloodied from our many wounds, collapse to the ground, and be done. Finally, to be able to rest in that perfectly complete rest that the gospel promises will be ours one day.

Many are the occasions in our lives when we feel this way. As children of God our way through this life is plagued with hardships and difficulties. It is, after all, a vale of tears. The young people of the church face many troublesome temptations. Often the difficulties of the transition from child to adult bring much confusion and distress.

Sometimes it seems that one trouble after another afflicts us, a loved one, or fellow member in the church. One need only read through the bulletins of the churches to see this. And these are only the published needs. So many others there are that we are unaware of. And then, of course, there is our sin. This to be sure is the real and fundamental warfare we fight. What battles we wage against our old man of sin! How often it seems that our defeat is sure.

It has been my own experience that no other time brings the fury of our struggle to the front more than when we find ourselves standing at the grave of a loved one. Here, as in no other place we find that the battle rages. In fact, in I Corinthians 15:26 the apostle Paul refers to death as “the last enemy.” Here we are physically able to stand on the very brink and stare into that dark chasm that is the grave. Not one of us is able to do so in and of ourselves without fear. From an earthly point of view we can see only defeat. Certainly Satan is here too. Most assuredly he stands at our side and whispers in our ear that the battle is too difficult, the road too long, the pain too much to bear. Give up. There can be no great victory here for you.

When we are assailed, whether it is at the grave of a loved one or in some other hardship or adversity that the Lord calls us to walk through, oh how we long to be loosed from these earthly bonds, from this body of sin! To be where all tears will be wiped away, where death will be abolished, where sorrow and pain no longer afflict! (Rev. 21:4)

In this we are no different from Elijah, the great prophet of God. He, as we often are, was no longer able to continue the fight. No longer, that is, in his own strength. You see, Elijah had lost sight of the fact that these things he had done and been a part of were not his to claim. He had not withheld the rain. He had not commanded the ravens to bring him food. He had not by his own power raised from the dead the widow’s son. He had not successfully proven that Jehovah was God rather than Baal. He had simply been an instrument used by God. He had done nothing of himself. And this is indeed that which brings him to the valley in which he now finds himself; unable and unwilling to persevere but wanting simply to give up. Once again God must remind Elijah that he is in control.

This too is the case with us, is it not? No sooner has God shown us his mighty power through some occasion in our lives than we are once again off on our way, seemingly in our own strength, having so soon forgotten God’s mercy toward us. This, as we always find, invariably ends in God, in his great love for us, reminding us that our strength is not our own. Without his grace and mercy we are utterly helpless and unable to exist, much less carry on in the battle.

So the Lord sends his angel to Elijah. He sends that angel to provide physical sustenance for Elijah to be sure. Once again God extraordinarily provides for Elijah’s physical needs as he had done so many times in the past.

God sent the angel in order to show Elijah that he will provide for him and never leave him. As he has strengthened him in the past and given him the grace he needed then, so now in the present distress in which he finds himself as well as in the future

he would continue to be the all sufficient God. He will continue to hold Elijah in the hollow of his hand.

The Lord also intends to show Elijah in the sending of the angel that indeed he is not able to go on in his own strength. “Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee” (I Kings 19:7). Clearly there is a battle yet to be fought and the battle that remains his to fight is too great for him, yes, even this great man of God. Without the preserving grace of God the battle for Elijah would be lost.

And finally, the Lord calls Elijah back into the battle once again. Elijah is tired, bruised, and wounded. His only desire is for the Lord to take him home and declare an end to his earthly fight. And yet his battle is not over.

God makes this clear to Elijah in the fact that he does not grant his wish to end his life. Although the Lord does not need Elijah to fulfill his purpose, he is nevertheless pleased to continue to use him to carry out his will. God also makes this clear in his command to Elijah through his angel that he rise up and eat the food provided for him. Why? Because the battle is not over! Exhausted though he be, the fighting rages on. The Lord has work for him to do yet. He must yet pronounce God’s judgment on Ahab.

That call, as it came to Elijah so many years ago, comes to you and me today and every day that the Lord is pleased to give us life. Weak and weary sinner, by God’s grace, fight on! The battle is not over for you as it is for your loved one or for the many soldiers who have gone before you and have fought the good fight, have finished their course, and have kept the faith (II Timothy 4:7).

And just as it was the case with Elijah so long ago, we cannot do so in ourselves. Only by the grace of God are we able to once again don our heavy armor, lift our battle scarred shield, and grasp our bloodied sword in order to enter the fray once more. Only in the strength that the Lord gives are we able to do this.

But as we fight on we must hold on to this wonderful truth. No matter how we stumble, no matter how often we are wounded, no matter how hopeless it may seem to us, our victory is sure. It has already been won by the Captain of our salvation. Though engulfed in the raging battle that surrounds us we are already victorious! Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished this in his death and resurrection and in it has assured our salvation. This indeed is our eternal hope and sure confidence. This it is that strengthens us and enables us to persevere.

And so believer, young or old, fight on in the assurance of I Corinthians 15: 53–57: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on

immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let the battle cry be heard; Onward Christian Soldiers!