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Matthew 16:18

“THE ARMY THAT ALL HELL CANNOT STOP”

There is a battle raging!

There has been an unseen war, being waged since the beginning of history. You cannot read about it in the headlines, but it is very real.

It is being fought in order to decide who shall control planet Earth. Shall earth be dominated by the evil powers of Satan? Or shall the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God?

This blessed Book is a chronicle of victories and losses. And it promises that the battle will continue, until there is a final victory by one side or the other.

All of the wars and human struggles, which are recorded by our media, are only small skirmishes in the larger scope of things. Even the parties, who are involved, do not understand how they are playing a part in a much larger scheme, about which they have no knowledge and over which they have little or no control. They are simply pawns, being played for personal advantage, by the evil one, the present day “god of this world,” Satan.

Let me add that each of us is involved in this unseen war, whether we choose to be or not. No one is neutral.

Jesus said clearly that “he who is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). That’s pretty plainly spoken I’d say.

Even those, who claim to be “independent” and are only in this life for themselves and their own interests, are actually “in the hands of the evil one,” and “the god of this world has blinded their minds” (II Corinthians 4:4). They really do not know what is going on.

The lines are clearly drawn. And everyone of us are either on one side or the other. Some of us have deliberately chosen the side on which we will stand.

And each generation must make advances for their side, or they must be forced to retreat. Our godly forefathers, in this country, chose to advance the cause of Christ. And because of that, we were given a heritage that is far and above those other nations, which have been kept in darkness and heathen bondage to the evil one.

Today I am trying to enlist people for an “Army that all Hell cannot stop.” My captain, Jesus Christ, has said that He is, in every generation, going to build His church, “and the very gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

I am here in Ft. Myers as His recruitment officer, working to enlist soldiers into his winning army. We are looking for people, who will be conscious and active participants in this battle for the future of our planet!

My God is looking for YOU!

Today, I am coming to you as a Recruitment Officer.

Next week I shall come to you as a Training Officer. And then on the following Sunday, I shall be here as...

A Deployment Officer.

Allow me to try to convince you to enlist today and to become active on the winning side. You can choose survival or victory. Let me help you prepare yourself for the ultimate victory!

May I point out to you, from God's hand Book for battle strategy (hold up Bible), that His army is:

I. A VITAL ARMY

God's conquest is vital to the future of planet Earth. He has called His troops to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

Truly, Satan's control of the world system has led to ever-increasing darkness and decay. Just take any field of human endeavor, and it seems to lead to corruption. Be it politics, education, science, or the arts, the direction is always downward, and putrid corruption is always found at the bottom of it. Meanwhile, the mass of humanity are surrounded by an ever-increasing darkness, where they don't even know they are being used and abused in someone else's agenda for control of society.

And there is only one hope for any generation. There must be present enough salt, which can preserve things from decay and hinder the progress of putrefying corruption.

In the time of Jesus' visit to Earth, there was no refrigeration. Salt was used to preserve things from decay and to keep infection from taking over a wound or sore.

So Jesus told His disciples to be "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Today, we are still the only ones, who can hold the progress of corruption in our society. And it may be a battle, but--thank God--we can make a difference!

Jesus also described his troops as "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). And we are to "let our light shine before men," so that they will not be held in darkness, as ignorant pawns in Satan's game of world domination.

I want to tell you, the Lord's army is a vital army. We are the only hope in a world of corruption, where people are kept in the dark.

But notice, also, that the Lord's army is...

II. A VAGUE ARMY

God's army is vague. It is hard to locate or put your finger on. It is involved in an unseen and spiritual warfare.

Paul reminds us, in Ephesians 6:12, that: "we wrestle not against flesh and blood (enemies), but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of evil in high places." Our enemies are involved in a vague and insidious contest for the minds and loyalties of people. Satan subtly entangles them in his agenda and causes them to unknowingly work against the very Creator God, who made them. And we are always trying to win them back and set the prisoners free from these mental "strongholds," in which they are held (II Corinthians 10:4).

Like the French resistance army, in World War II, the army of the Lord is not located in some building, nor does it belong to some political party, nor does it work in conjunction with some other worthy cause. No! it is an army, which is loosely organized and often unnoticed, but its members have the common goal of spreading the influence and rule of their leader, Jesus Christ.

Not even the organized church is truly representative of His army. If you do not believe that, you should have been at the school board meeting, where we were trying to get the Bible back into our schools, where it had once been the original textbook for American education. There were Protestant clergymen who spoke out against doing it. There was even a Southern Baptist clergyman, who spoke on keeping out the Word of God. They even called us Bible-believing Christians: the “Darth Vaders” of our society. I prefer to think of us as the Luke Skywalker, going up against “the Evil Empire.”

I say all this to point out that organized religion does not house nor direct “the Army that all Hell cannot stop.” No! It is an underground army, directed by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. It cuts across denominational lines and involves the truly committed in all of these churches. I would like to think that McGregor Baptist is where you could find a large group of God’s commandoes!

That’s why I am not simply enlisting you to join this church, although I hope you will find it the best place where you can train for the army of the Lord. I am enlisting you to God’s active army, that all Hell will not be able to prevail against.

Notice also that God’s army must be...

III. A VAST ARMY

There is so much that needs to be done, and the enemy has got the world so much under his evil control, that there must be a large and vast army to counteract it. That’s why Jesus tells us, in every new generation, that “the harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray you, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He will send fourth laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38).

Our Commander and Chief, Jesus Christ, made it clear that the job was always going to be a big one. The fields of opportunity are ripe for the picking.

But there always seems to be a shortage of those who are willing to be laborers in the effort. God’s army is too often working with a skeleton crew.

I don’t know why this must be so. Nearly 60% of Americans claim to be believers and church attenders. If they each worked at the opportunities we have to win the lost and to convert our nation back to the Christian ideals, on which it was formed, you’d think we could get the job done.

Apparently, a lot of those, who profess to be Christians, must not understand that they are needed to be actively involved, or else they do not really believe that there is a battle going on. The opportunities are many, but the actual laborers--those who try to make a difference--are few!

Listen, my friends, God is looking for a vast army. We are praying for a large number of volunteers, who can help to win this unseen war for the future of our nation and our world. Certainly, the opportunities are too great for a few “professionals” in the organization of the church.

Someone once described a football game as “eleven men, who are badly in need of rest, being watched by 15,000 people, who are badly in need of exercise.” The same could be said of many churches. They become a spectator sport. And we pay the preacher to do the ministering to a lost and dying world, while we pursue other interests.

My friends, that is a sure formula for defeat, in this battle which is raging for our planet. God needs a vast army.

God wants you to be a part of the action! Just to come once a week and worship Him and to drop a couple spare dollars into the offering plate and to be a quiet witness at our jobs--if this is all we are willing to do--is an offense to Him, in light of all that needs to be done and in light of the sacrifices that He and His followers have made, down through the ages, in order to win the battle.

He is looking, and we are praying, for a vast army--a huge army of volunteers, who can stand in the gap and win the battle in our generation, through His power and our faith. He is looking for a vast army, against which the very forces of Hell cannot prevail!

Notice also that God’s army must be...

IV. A VISIONARY ARMY

God’s foot soldiers must be able to see the big picture. We are not struggling for temporary survival. We are in a battle for permanent control of our planet, for time and eternity.

It is so easy to get distracted by the everyday affairs of making a living and taking care of family and paying bills. But Jesus warned his soldiers not to be “entangled with the things of this world” (II Timothy 2:4) to the point that we lose sight of the big picture.

In fact, it is very possible that the challenges, which face us, are attacks from the enemy. Paul often spoke of being “hindered” by Satan, in his attempts to spread the kingdom of God. The “god of this world” will use every day problems to hinder our service in God’s army.

Unseen forces of the enemy can try to defeat us, too. Now we cannot be paranoid and imagine a demon behind every bush. But, on the other hand, we should not be completely surprised if we have to struggle against the very environment, in which we work for God.

But never forget the big picture. Even the struggles which we have now “are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be ours,” when Christ takes His throne, once and for all, and we reign with Him (Romans 8:18).

We must be faithful to the Lord’s work, even in the face of constant obstacles and hindrances. These should not be allowed to slow us down, in our pursuit of our assignment for Him. Paul reminds us, in II Corinthians 4:16-17, to “faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed (refocused) day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...”

Paul reminded his buck privates, Timothy and Titus to: “Fight the good fight of faith” (I Timothy 6:12). “Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ” (II Timothy 2:3). Don’t allow yourself to be “entangled in civilian pursuits,” so much that you lose the big picture (II Timothy 2:4).

Jesus is looking today for a vast army, who are sold-out to winning this planet back to Him and who will stay focused on that vision, in the midst of their every day lives. That is the kind of army that all Hell cannot stop.

Jesus is also forming...

V. A VIABLE ARMY

His army is viable, in that everyone who has volunteered can have a place where he fits. Unlike the U.S. Army, who took Florida boys and trained them to be snow ski troopers, or who took mountaineers and turned them into desert fighters, our Lord has given to each member of His army special abilities or gifts for their place in His army. And He wants to use each of them in the battle.

Some have communicative gifts. Others have administrative gifts. Others have gifts of helping people or showing mercy in the name of Jesus. Some are gifted to give support. Others are gifted to finance the work of God. But each has some viable gift for a place in the army of God.

We shall be talking about these gifts in a later sermon. We shall also help you to identify your gift, so that you can find your best place on the team.

Perhaps some of you have been frustrated in some of the Christian service, which you have tried. You may have dutifully attempted a task for which you were not gifted. It would be like trying to make a fighter pilot out of someone who did not have twenty-twenty vision.

But God has a special place for each of His specially-chosen workers. And He has promised us “all power” to do what must be done. He has even promised that we would be able to do “greater works” than He had done, while He was on earth.

So never doubt yourself. There is a viable place in God’s army for you.

But don’t miss this. God’s army is...

VI. A VOLUNTEER ARMY

Jesus said that “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 20:16). I believe that means that the call has gone out for volunteers, but too few have responded.

Through the years, God’s work has been carried out by “the faithful few.” I’ve heard that expression for years.

This is not God’s plan. He is looking to develop a vast and viable army, to stand against the forces of Hell. And His call, for volunteers, keeps going out again and again.

I truly believe that the future of God’s work lies in the hands of a vast army of “volunteers.” In the places where the biggest impact on our society is being made by some local church, you will find that there are many, many “volunteers.”

The future effectiveness of McGregor Baptist Church lies with the number of committed “volunteers,” who can pitch-in and lead-out in the work of spreading God’s kingdom.

Will you be one of them? Will you begin to realize the membership in the true church of Jesus Christ is a commitment to serve in the Lord’s army?

Years ago, in the dark ages, the church and its influence was weak. A few clergymen ruled the church, like princes, and the majority of God’s people were kept in the dark, because they could not even read God’s instruction Book for themselves.

But there came a great Reformation, where the laymen were given the Word of God for themselves. And so great was the force of this, that there was a cultural Renaissance, which followed. The very culture was changed, from the Dark Ages to the Enlightenment.

Today, we are in a second Reformation, where the work of the ministry is being given to the laymen, where it first belonged. And God-only-knows how much victory will come, if the laymen will only assume the leadership in the battle, which was meant to be theirs.

As you know, “yours-truly” has always played down all this “Reverend” stuff. I have always seen my task, not as being a “lord over God’s flock,” but as setting “an example” (I Peter 5:7) and of “equipping the saints for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). Believe me, no one will be happier to see you lead out in the battle to bring people into the kingdom of our God.

Oh, in our day as never before, God is raising up a great army of volunteers, and He promises that all Hell cannot stop them!

But we cannot finish this recruitment message, without mentioning that God’s volunteer army is also...

VII. A VICTORIOUS ARMY

Jesus has promised that “the very gates of Hell will not prevail against” us. We are on the winning side. It is sure. We cannot lose!

I believe that we all like to pick a winner, whenever possible. Well, I can tell you--on the authority of God’s own Word--that the Lord’s army will be victorious.

Some of us may not live to see that ultimate victory, during this short span that we humans call “life.” But we shall see it some day.

Just before that final battle of the ages, that battle called Armageddon, “the Lord Jesus shall descend from heaven with the shout of command and the great trumpet call of God. And the dead in Christ shall be the first to rise and meet Him. And then we who remain alive on the earth will be caught up with them (raptured) in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thess. 4:16-17).

This will be the time, when God assembles His troops for battle. For the next seven years, He will be perfecting us for the days ahead. Anything in our lives, which may keep us from being ready to rule with Him, will be dealt with.

Then we shall accompany Him, from heaven, for that last great showdown, when He will destroy the forces of evil and all those who have gone along with the devil’s world system.

Then He will rule as king of kings and Lord of Lords. And we shall rule with Him...for eternity!

Listen, victory is sure! God said it, and that settles it. I just read about it in the last chapter of this Book.

Believe me, it is a victorious army, for which I am recruiting you today! It is a victorious army, for which we will be training you in the future. It is a victorious army, in which you will take your viable place of service.

Now you may say: “I don’t believe all of this.” Well, that’s your privilege. But you will find out! Only then it will be too late. You must “choose you this day whom you will serve; but as for me and my house, we’ll serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

You may say: “This is too unsure of a thing, on which to gamble my whole life away.” Sorry it looks that way to you. I believe that there is nothing surer!

Is it a gamble to follow the only winner in history? Last week I reminded you that Jesus is the only one to go up against our worst enemy, death, and to come out victorious. That is the best-attested fact in history. I'd far rather gamble my future on a winner than to risk my future, along with all the other losers!

"You are talking a pretty serious commitment, preacher." You'd better believe I am!

But I am also talking about some pretty serious rewards. I am offering you an opportunity to rule with Jesus over a new heaven and a new earth, for the endless ages of eternity.

Why, a lifetime, of the best that this world has to offer, is like only the first morning of one day in eternity. Yes, it's a big commitment that I'm asking you to make. But the consequences are enormous.

And you don't have forever to make up your mind. God says: "My Spirit shall not always strive with a man" (Genesis 6:3). God's call to salvation and service does not go on for ever. He tells us, in Hebrews 3:15: "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

It could well be "now or never!" I do not know where the Spirit of God is, in His attempt to enlist you. I do not know how many times you have turned Him away already. Could this be the last time that He will give you the glorious opportunity to join his victorious volunteer army?

Come to Jesus today. Enlist for volunteer service in "The Army That All Hell Cannot Stop!"