

✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

On January 27, 1973, many young American men breathed a sigh of relief. On that day United States Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announced the end of the military draft. Ever since then our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and now Space Force have been all-volunteer.

When it comes to the Kingdom of God, though, the draft has not yet ended. God still recruits for his army. In fact he enlisted you. You may not remember our Lord conscripting you as a fresh recruit. He probably issued you your tiny all-white uniform at the front of a church. You were likely less than two feet tall. Do you get it? Maybe what the apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians (3:27) will help: *As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ like a garment.* Do you get it now? When we were baptized, God clothed us with Christ's righteousness. Revelation 19 describes the uniform this way: ¹⁴*The armies of heaven were...dressed in fine linen, white and clean.* Regardless of what you wore to church this morning, when our Commander looks at you, he sees an army of soldiers (cavalry in this case) all dressed in the brilliant uniform of his pure holiness. This is reality to our almighty Redeemer.

If you enjoy reading the book of Revelation, you may have noticed

something odd about the Lord's army. The soldiers never do any real fighting. They never shoot arrows. They never pierce the liver of their enemy with a sword. The Lord's soldiers don't do bodily harm to others. Look at us again through what the Holy Spirit reveals. We are dressed in our pure white uniforms. We ride on white horses following the Rider on his white horse. But the battle happens between Christ on the one side and Satan and his allies on the other. Read through Revelation carefully and you'll note several times when the forces of Satan gather to crush the Church. Some believers are even put to death. But every time it looks like Satan is about to squash God's people, Jesus and his angels appear, and the war is suddenly over. Jesus wins. So we win. But Jesus does all the fighting. He does all the conquering.

"So if Jesus does not need us to fight for him, why does he draft us into his army?" Well, look at it from Jesus' perspective. Victory is his, and he doesn't want us worrying we'll lose. Better for us to train for battle and ride with Jesus and share in his victory than sit on the ground like helpless victims. Look, there he goes again, riding into another battle for us. All you who have been baptized into the army of Jesus, let's go. Mount up. Let's RIDE WITH Jesus. His name is THE WORD OF GOD because he is the message. Let's follow Jesus into everlasting triumph.

Notice that we are discussing this on Ascension Sunday. ^When Christ ascended, how many of his enemies were still winning? Not sin. Sin can't keep us captive, unless we like a particular sin and don't want to repent of it. *Not death. Death can't hold us in the grave. Burial is just a temporary arrangement for our mortal remains until the final trumpet sounds and all the dead are raised. *Not Satan. Satan tries to distract us from God's Word by all the excitement the world can offer, but if we keep our eyes and ears and hearts in God's Word through daily devotions and frequent worship, Satan can't separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We don't fret that Christ left us behind while he is off preparing a place for us in his heavenly home. On the Last Day he will come back and retrieve us for heaven. And in the meantime he is always with us in an invisible way, leading us daily in spiritual warfare. You could say: we are his special forces.

When anyone tries to enter the ranks of the US special forces, like the Rangers or the Seals, they go through rigorous training. The first part not only toughens them up, it weeds out those who don't have enough of the right mental strength. I admire our US special forces. But I doubt any of them could have taken on the mission that God's Son took on. The apostle John reports: ¹¹*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.* ¹³*He is dressed in a*

robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. You understand what John is referring to. God planned to save all sinners. Jesus was faithful and true to his Father's plan. The bloody robe the Rider wears reminds us of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. He poured out his blood unto death because this was the punishment we sinners deserve, and he wanted to rescue us from it. But see, now he lives.

What else does the apostle John tell us about this resurrected Rider? ¹¹*With justice he judges and makes war.* He never gets it wrong. He never commits a war crime. He goes after only those who suppress the truth about our sin and his mercy. ¹⁵*Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.* "Why is the sword in his mouth instead of in his hand?" Because the mouth is where words come out. This sword is made up of words. This sword is God's Word. The one whose name is 'the Word of God' has the message of God coming out of his mouth. By his message Jesus is trying to strike down unbelief in every nation and to capture all souls for his kingdom of life and peace and joy. Jesus referred to this in today's Gospel lesson when he revealed: *The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Luke 24:46-47).

But when people stubbornly cling to the big lie that there's nothing really wrong

with them, that they don't need to repent of all sin, then God's Word becomes a tool for striking them down no matter which nation they come from. They get thrown into ¹⁵*the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty*. They miss out on the victory Christ wanted them to have with him.

Jesus doesn't want anyone to miss out on his victory. This is why he recruits us into his army and teaches us to fight against sin and unbelief through God's message. Now we RIDE WITH THE WORD OF GOD to wage spiritual war against the forces of evil in all aspects of our life. This 'living according to God's Word' is pictured in our text with these words: ¹⁴*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.* RIDE WITH Jesus, THE WORD OF GOD. Take up the fight against sin by slicing every temptation with the sword of Jesus, the Word of God. Cut the head of guilt off by reminding yourself that every sin has been expunged from your record. When Satan tries to drag you into temptation, whack his hands with God's Word. Let's ride behind the Rider on the white horse, waging spiritual warfare by helping people see us and themselves as sinners in God's eyes, and then by helping them see themselves and us as redeemed through Jesus' blood. There is an urgency to this spiritual warfare. People have been fatally wounded by sin. They are dying. Conquer death for them by

sharing the risen Jesus with them. You have authority from God to talk about the victory Jesus won for you, the peace he made with you, the new life he gave you, the certain hope he offered you when he smashed death's ability to hold on to you.

Someone might object, "I thought you said the army of Jesus never does any real fighting. Didn't Jesus already win the war? Why do I need to RIDE WITH THE WORD OF GOD?" You must be paying attention because that's a good question. Yes, Jesus calls you to fight a war that he has already won. But don't let that stop you. It's like when a baby jaguar is born. The jaguar mother has to teach her young how to hunt. She does this by capturing a small deer, a large rodent, or a wild dog. But she doesn't kill it. She only subdues it and brings the wounded animal to her cub. She lets her cub attack and kill the prey. There's never a doubt that the wounded prey will become that day's dinner. The mother has made sure of it. But she lets her little cub participate in her conquest.

That's like what Jesus does for you and me. He already won the war. Satan lost. Death lost. Sin lost. But Jesus recruits us to follow him and fight. He doesn't need our help any more than a mother jaguar needs her cub's help. But he wants us to engage in spiritual warfare. Let's RIDE WITH THE WORD OF GOD. Attack the enemies your King has already defeated. Proclaim his Word to your own heart. Fill your heart so full

during your daily Bible reading that the gospel comes spilling out of you in all kinds of marvelous ways. Watch for opportunities to point people to Christ, their only Savior. Explain why you strive for excellence in everything you do: because that's one good way to express your gratitude to the Redeemer. Show how he helps with fears and anxieties as you calm yourself with his promises. Demonstrate how he causes joy even on your saddest days. Explain the peace you have because he gladly hears your gratitude. Fight the good fight of faith. Share in the victory of our Lord.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Nothing like the battle cry to get the spiritual juices flowing. But can you hear it? My sinful flesh is whining right now. Yours too? "I don't want to fight. I'm a lover, not a fighter. I'm a conscientious objector. Can't we just live quietly, not rock the boat, not draw the attention of enemy snipers?" If you're anything like I am, I don't enjoy recounting the times I have listened to my flesh and failed to follow Jesus into battle. I don't want anyone to know about the times I deserted my spiritual duties instead of RIDING WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

But through God's message, Jesus keeps recruiting us deserters back into his army. He points us to our baptism as if to say, "It's still washing you clean. It still clothes you in a fresh uniform for battle every day. You have my full pardon for dodging the draft." President

Jimmy Carter did something like this. On January 21, 1977, he issued a full pardon to all the Americans who had dodged the draft during the Vietnam War. These men had not registered for military service, or they escaped to Canada or another country. Their guilt was pardoned with the stroke of a pen.

"Lord Jesus, we are sorry for our cowardice." You are pardoned! "Lord, we are sorry for the times we didn't care what happens to those who won't make time for your Word." Pardoned! "Lord, we are sorry for all the times we wouldn't join the fight against the temptations of Satan." Pardoned!

Soldiers of the Lord, RIDE WITH THE WORD OF GOD. Praise your Savior by how you live. Refuse to compromise the truths revealed in the Bible. Rise up in peace to thank him for his forgiveness. Don't wait until you feel like you can forgive yourself—Jesus already forgave you. It is finished. Assemble on Sundays to strengthen your faith by hearing his Word of forgiveness and by regularly receiving the Sacrament of his body and blood. Claim as your King the one whose ¹²*eyes are like blazing fire*, who wears many crowns on his head. Claim as your Lord the one whose robe and thigh bears his name: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Christ ascended! The victory is yours! RIDE WITH THE WORD OF GOD.