**WAR STORIES**

***Longing For The Land of the Living***

Gardner Hall, a good friend from my college days long ago and far away, tells the humorous, but sobering, story of his grandfather, Gardner Hall, Sr. He was in bad health and in critical care, not expected to be long for this world. One of his friends called him on the phone and asked, "Gardner, are you still in the land of the living?" Quick as a flash, old brother Hall replied, "No, I'm in the land of the dying, but I sure hope to soon be in the land of the living."

Now that aged soldier of the cross had his perspective just right. He had a God-view, not a worldview. Indeed, we are all presently in the world of the dying, for Hebrews 9:27 soberly reminds us, "*It is appointed unto man once to die*…" Likewise, Paul puts it in unmistakable terms in 2 Cor 4:16-18 when he says, "*Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day*." Yes, our outward man is perishing, but our inward spirit is drawing closer and closer to Christ. While today I might be older than I’ve ever been before, it can also be said that today I’m closer to seeing Jesus than I’ve ever been before.

Paul continued his thoughts in 2 Cor 4:17-18 with this hopeful thought: "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal*."

This dying process is merely called "*our light affliction*" and it is endured "*but for a moment*." Now brother, I can deal with “temporary” and “momentary,” can’t you? Paul, looking at death through the lens of God, portrays it as no big deal. It is viewed as but a transition from the good to the great. It’s seen as a change from this terrestrial life’s “light” affliction to the celestial world’s “heavy-weight” of glory. All of my afflictions in this life, when weighed on the scales in heaven, will tip the needle to maybe 20 pounds. But then, when I step on the scales of eternal glory, I will instantly realize I have moved into the heavy-weight division! What I endure in this land of hospitals, nursing homes, funerals and graveyards will, at the moment of death, become but a distant memory and a mere blip on the radar screen. When the angels carry my spirit to Abraham’s bosom (Lk. 16:22), and when Christ bids me become a joint-heir with Him in glory (Rom. 8:17), any bitter trials I experienced in this “land of the dying” will only be fun war-stories to share with you in eternity.

Wasn’t it the Christian soldier’s war stories that James and Peter were referencing in their descriptions of our life on earth?

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing”* (Jam. 1:2-4).

*“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls”* (I Pet 1:6-9).

Most true veteran soldiers only tell their war stories to one another. Only combat veterans know the real meaning of foxhole fears, and only speak of it among themselves. They relive the whizz of bullets past their head and the teeth-rattling earthquake of exploding bombs that shook them to their soul. These old soldiers often gather at VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) halls across America. There they might humbly share how they won the Purple heart, Silver Star or Medal of Honor. These badges of war are won by young men and women who wore the uniform and served their country to give us our freedom. I can’t begin to count how many books I have read that describe what soldiers endure in the horrors of war.

But I never served, so I have none of those stories to tell.

But I have served in the army of the Lord! I enlisted on April 26, 1964 and have proudly served under “*the Captain of your salvation*” for 57 years (Heb. 2:10). Since this is an all-volunteer army (there is no draft) may I ask you this question, “When did you enlist?” If you haven’t already I pray you quickly sign on to become a Christian “*soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:3; Phile. 2) and “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Sure, there will be “*fiery darts from the wicked one”* (Eph. 6:10-17), and yes, “*all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12), but who wants to go to heaven and have no war stories to tell? Not me!

I send this article to you on the day I am to drive up to Duluth, Minnesota and attend the memorial service for an old soldier of the cross. Melvin Krumrei is to be buried next to his beloved wife Alice at Union Cemetery. Alice took off her battle armor 14 years ago on September 4, 2006. I wept (for joy) at her grave, knowing she had crossed over from the land of dying into the land of the living.

Now I shall witness this old soldier be buried beside her to await the resurrection in which “*all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and come forth*” (Jn. 5:28). For well over 40 years this blessed couple were like sentries standing guard on the ramparts for the gospel in Duluth. For over 16 years I drove up there each month to preach. They were always eager and ready to hear the gospel and share it with anyone and everyone. I loved them then and love them still. Oh the stories they will be able to tell in Heaven’s VFW (note: we are all soldiers serving in foreign wars, for this world is not our home).

As we all draw closer to laying down our fatigues of battle I hope that we all have war stories to tell in heaven. I already know some of Melvin and Alice’s, and hope they will share them with you when all of God’s singers get home. What are yours?

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long.

This day the noise of battle, the next the victor’s song.
Put on the gospel armor, and watching unto prayer,

Where duty calls, or danger, be never wanting there.

Brother Melvin, sister Alice, I’ll see you in the land of the living. – Rick