

And He will be called...

## Mighty God

I grew up with my father's creed: *fight your own battles*. To some extent, it's a useful and honourable way to live. The Bible even has a name for this: *lex talionis* – an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.<sup>iii</sup>

*Lex talionis* was actually a just and humane principle of recompense. It wasn't a policy of vengeance - exactly the opposite. It was a strategy to end the war, not to escalate it, to avoid the blood feud rather than stir it. The law recognized that injury warranted injury, but only and strictly proportionally, to the scale it had been meted out, no more, no less. Then it stopped.

But everything in us (or is it just me?) wants to go further than that. An eye is never enough recompense for an eye, a tooth is never sufficient payback for a tooth. I want two eyes for my one, a mouthful of teeth for my single tooth. A spirit of retaliation and self-vindication haunts my battles.

That's one side of it.

The other side is that most of us are experts at dodging conflict. We placate or avoid our enemy, but then murder them in our minds, and sometimes with our speech. We seethe on the inside and smile on the outside. We fuel our anger but rarely address it.

So we tend to alternate between two postures: defensiveness and evasiveness. But the sum of both approaches is the same: we seldom resolve conflicts.

Isaiah has some good news.

"He will be called *Mighty God*." A better rendering of that is *Warrior God* or *Fighter God*. Isaiah here describes, not an *attribute* of the Messiah, but an *action* that characterizes him – an action that, if we grasp it, will make an enormous difference in how we live our lives: *He's a warrior, and he'll fight our battles. He'll settle our scores. He'll vindicate us.*

Our responsibility is to show up.

Isaiah writes under conditions of war and rumours of war. The Assyrians, one of Israel's ancient and most fearsome enemies, are coming. They bring the threat of mass destruction, total annihilation.

In this context, two names of the Messiah are particularly noteworthy: Prince of Peace, and Warrior God. In fact, as incompatible as those two names seem on the surface, each is needed to guarantee the other. Our assurance that the Messiah is indeed Prince of Peace is that he is also Warrior God. We have peace because he fights our battles: "you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor."

To reassure the people that God is capable of such a feat, even up against an army as vicious and massive as the Assyrians, Isaiah hints at the story of Gideon and the Midianites.<sup>iv</sup>

**The early church lived lives of non-retaliation. They trusted God to fight their battles. And the cumulative results of that were stunning.**

It's a famous story. The Midianites, 135,000 strong, have the Israelites under sore oppression. The people cry out to God, and God raises up Gideon – no hero, with no skill in battle, though the angel of the Lord calls *him* Mighty Warrior – to be the divine instrument of deliverance.

Gideon recruits 32,000 farmers for the fight. God comes up with a de-recruitment plan and strips that number down to 300. Then He sends them up weaponless against the Midianites, all 135,000 of them. And *those guys* know how to fight.

Here's God's strange logic for His tactic: "You have too many men *for me* to deliver Midian into their hands..."<sup>v</sup>

Gideon has not been recruited to fight. He's been recruited to watch. His job, along with the 300, is to *show up*.

The people of God in the Old Testament understood this – the warrior nature of God – in the most literal, earthy, political terms. God actually went out and fought many of their battles, scattering the enemy, shattering the yoke. At Jericho, with Jehoshaphat, against the Arameans, the Amalekites, the Moabites, the Philistines, with Daniel in the lion's den,

with Esther against Haman, with Nehemiah against his detractors. Story after story, all with the same essential message: *God will fight your battles.*

But it's not until the New Testament that we really understand fully the nature of this promise. The conviction that God will fight our battles runs so deep in the New Testament that at times the counsel and example of the early Christians strikes us as madness – turning the other cheek, feeding their enemies, blessing those who hated them.

The early Church lived lives of non-retaliation. They trusted God to fight their battles. And the cumulative results of that were stunning. The historian Will Durant wrote this about the early Church:

There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned and oppressed by a succession of emperors, bearing all trials with a fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope *and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known.* Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won.<sup>vi</sup>

Unlike the Israelites, the early Christians rarely saw God go out in physical battle against their enemies. In fact, we know from the biblical record and from historical accounts that persecution against Christians got worse and worse.

But their confidence was based on a greater conquest against a greater enemy:

And having [through the cross] disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.<sup>vii</sup>

One greater than Gideon is here. Jesus, in the most unlikely way, all alone and utterly weaponless, disarmed the very powers of sin and death, and then made a spectacle of them. He shattered the yoke of the oppressor, and held him up to public mockery.

He fights for you.

What battles are you in right now that are not yours to fight? You need

to show up, but mostly you're there just to witness God's actions, stand in God's presence, behold God's victory.

Be still, and know that He is Mighty Warrior.

**NOTES:**

- iii Exodus 21:23-24.
- iv Isaiah 9:4.
- v Judges 7:2.
- vi Will Durant, Caesar and Christ, 652.
- vii Colossians 2:15.

