

“March On, My Soul; Be Strong!”

✠ In the Lord’s authority (vv.16-18)

✠ In God’s Gospel power (vv.19-20)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, dear children of God:

Does everything really have to be so complicated? Is it possible that sometimes the problem is simple; the solution simple? Ever notice how naturally we humans can complicate things?

Summers working on my Granddad’s ranch meant driving a backhoe that sometimes wouldn’t start. One time I was sure it was complicated. The hired man who was also a mechanic took a stick and stuck it in the fuel tank. “You’re out of diesel,” he says dryly. “But the gauge reads *Full*.” “The gauge is broken.” What would you be thinking? “You could have told me.” Maybe he did, and I forgot. Point is that it took someone else to show that the simple problem had a very simple solution. And God’s got a goal in mind for us today. Beyond politics to God’s peace: “**March On, My Soul; Be Strong!**”

✠ In the Lord’s authority (vv.16-18)

Who said that? Mrs. Lappidoth, one *firebrand of a woman*.¹ You may know her as Deborah in Judges 4, 5. **In the Lord’s authority** she sent for a commander named Barak to attack an invader. He said he’d only go if Deborah came with. “*All right. I will go with you, but because of the way you are going about it, the honor will not be yours. The LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.*” (Judges 4:9 EHV) Problem: cowardice. Solution: Listen and do what God says. They went, God won, and Deborah sang her song with Barak: **March On, My Soul; Be Strong!** Took courage – not complicated.

After rising from the dead Easter morning, **In the Lord’s authority** Jesus gave simple instructions through the women at His tomb: “*Do not be afraid. Go, tell my brothers that they should go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*” (Matthew 28:10 EHV) “*The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some hesitated because they were uncertain.*” Doubt and fear breed hesitation. To “*brothers,*” disciples who despite all warnings had deserted and denied him, Jesus comes without accusation. “*Peace be with you,*” he kept saying. Now He tells them how to bring that sacred, settled “*peace*” of God to the world. In this age of rage we want to worship in “*peace*” of heart and home and country. Complicated? Not in God’s view.

Jeremiah was branded a traitor by the king and military for preaching God’s truth: “You fight; you lose.” “*I am so miserable....[Everyone] curses me.*” Simple problem? Everyone is against me? Pity party, but no one comes! Simpler problem, easier solution: *Therefore this is what the LORD says. If you repent, I will take you back, so that you may stand before me. If you [speak] worthwhile...not worthless [words], you will be my spokesman....They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, because I am with you to save you and to rescue you, declares the LORD. I will rescue you from the hand of the wicked and...deliver you from the grasp of the ruthless.*” (Jeremiah 15:10, 19–21 EHV)

One word! The first for John the Baptist, first for Jesus: “**Repent, because the kingdom of heaven is near!**” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17) So people falsely accuse me (“racist” when they are!) I’m angry, but God tells me to repent? Before our New Year’s Eve Gospel, Jesus recalls two tragedies in the news, a tower fell on innocent people, a bloody massacre by despicable governor Pontius Pilate. “**Do you think they were worse sinners?**” Jesus asks. “**I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you will all perish too.**” (Luke 13:4f)

¹ EHV f.n. ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (wartburgproject.org) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

Complicated? Image David, so in love with Bathsheba. He commits adultery, then murder to cover it up. How can he feel sorry when he really loves her? First son dies, but then they have others, Solomon and Nathan. David needed a miracle of repentance in his heart. That's why we sing his prayer: ***“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence; or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation; uphold me with your free Spirit.”*** (Psalm 51:10-12) Repentance is a gift as Joseph Hart wrote, *Jesus gives us true repentance By His Spirit sent from heav'n; Whispers this transporting sentence, “Son, thy sins are all forgiv'n.”* (TLH 358:3)

To save us from doubt and fear Jesus refills the tank: ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*** He gives courage: ***“March On, My Soul; Be Strong!”*** **In the Lord's authority.**

✠ **In God's Gospel power (vv.19-20)**

Filled up **In God's Gospel power**, we still need tactical training. Back to our analogy. That backhoe had levers and pedals which the hire man demonstrated smoothly. Later he observed my lurching, “You're over-thinking this. Do this!”...smooth operation finally for me too. Are we over-thinking the politics of other people's sins? Careless indifference demands I *perish*. But ***“the LORD has laid on [Jesus] the iniquity [guilt] of us all.”*** (Isaiah 53:6 NIV) Our sins they are many; His mercy is more. (John Newton) Jesus' mercy says: ***“Love your neighbor.”*** We have **God's Gospel power** to love others.

“Go!” Jesus says, more literally, ***“While going,”*** everywhere in all your coming and going. Don't ***“make disciples,”*** and leave; literally, ***“Disciple all nations.”*** And not ***“nations”*** drawn by lines on a map. Matthew's Greek original: “πάντα τὰ ἔθνη” – *all the ethnic groups*. That includes “all ages” – unless someone thinks he can separate the babies from their *ethnic groups*! Other cultures don't seem to suffer so much from our Anglo disrespect for life of the unborn and our elderly. *Ethnic groups* tend to give much more honor to the Creator of the innocent unborn and the frail. The Triune God through Jesus Christ commands us to ***disciple all ethnic groups by baptizing***. **God's Gospel power** gives new life and salvation in baptism, God's *peace* surpasses all understanding; it guards hearts and minds and homes.

In God's Gospel power Jesus says ***“While going disciple all the ethnic groups by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*** God is angry if anyone calls Him by other names besides His Bible names. How would you feel if you gathered food for COVID and riot victims, but someone stole it for themselves? You work hard to build a house and business, someone burns it – as if it's theirs to destroy. Baptized ***into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***, God has put His saving name-reputation on you for all eternity. Title to your soul not written in ink, but in the blood of God's own Son. God shows no favoritism, does not look at the face, no prejudice.

In God's Gospel power ***disciple all the ethnic groups...by teaching them to guard and treasure all things as many as I have commanded you.*** We don't get to pick and choose which teachings of the Bible we like. Relieved of our sins of careless indifference, look at Jesus in a remote place with well over 5,000 people. He's tired, seeking vacation, but then ***moved with compassion for sheep without a shepherd.*** The disciples want to send them all away for food. ***“You give them something to eat.”*** Only a little boy came with lunch. No pointing finger from Jesus. He blessed and broke and multiplied the loaves and fishes with commands to waste nothing. Twelve baskets of leftovers!

We ***guard and treasure*** the Good News for hearts ready to listen. God wants all to know their guilt is gone, washed away in the flood of grace from the cross of Christ. While there's life, there's hope. No matter how far a sinful son has run, God wants him back. There still is room where the Triune God says: ***“Come now, let us reason together.... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*** (Isaiah 1:18 NIV84) ***“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our rebellious acts from us.”*** (Psalm 103:12) This age of rage is swirling toward judgment by Jesus. He promises, ***“Surely I am with you all the days to the gathered goal of the age.”*** This day: ***“March On, My Soul; Be Strong!”*** ***“Peace be with you.”*** Amen.