A Parable About A Soldier

(by David McClister)

Once, a great army was called to war. Much was at stake in this war, so the commanding officer of the troops made sure that every soldier was outfitted with all he would need to succeed on the battlefield. In particular, the commanding officer saw to it that every soldier was provided with a brand new sword. The war was engaged, and the fighting was fierce. One day, in one particular encounter, the enemy captured a soldier. The prisoner was taken back into the lands of the enemy and held as a POW for many years. The food was strange, as well as the surroundings. At first it was difficult, but eventually, however, he was able to adjust. One thing that made it easier was that the enemy allowed him all the recreational time he wanted. At times it almost made him forget that he was a prisoner. He was held in that land for so long that he learned to speak the language of his captors and even made friends among those who held him prisoner. Once in a while he tried to escape, but he was always captured before he got too far. After many, many years the enemy decided that the soldier had grown so old and weak that he did not constitute a threat to them anymore, so they released him.

When the freed prisoner returned to his homeland, he came back to great celebration. Old comrades greeted him; his wife and children hugged him. It had been so long since his captivity that they did not know him anymore. There was so much lost time that needed catching up, so many events he had missed – his children’s birthdays and graduations, changes in the world and in his own home town. At least, however, he was back. As he settled down into his life again, he wrote to his commanding officer to see if he could get his military pension. In fact, he even suggested that a medal and a special reward might be appropriate. Not many people survived that length of captivity.

His commanding officer summoned him to speak about the matter, and to tell of his experiences as a prisoner of war. Years of captivity had taken their toll on the soldier, who now looked worn and haggard. Surprisingly, the commanding officer still retained much of his youthful appearance. When the two met, the soldier recounted the life he had lived in enemy hands. It was a sad story indeed, and the commander was saddened by the tale of the life that had been wasted for all those years.

The commanding officer was most interested, however, in the details of how the soldier had been captured. *“Did you find yourself alone on the battlefield, cut off from the support of other troops?”* he asked. *“Not really,”* said the soldier. *“There were other troops in the area, but at that moment I just didn’t call out to them. I really did not think I was in much danger at the time. It turns out that I was wrong.”* The commander then asked, *“Well, at exactly what point in all of this did you lose your sword?”* The soldier responded, *“I didn’t lose my sword. It was right by my side. I even had my hand on it when the enemy grabbed me and took me.”* Surprised, the commander asked, *“Let me get this straight. You were walking around on the battlefield and your sword was in its scabbard?” “Yes,”* the soldier said, *“I never lost my sword. In fact, all the while I was in captivity, the enemy let me keep it. I had it in my cell with me for all these years.”*

The commander was dumbfounded. *“They let you keep your sword? With you?” “Yes,”* the soldier said. *“I just never got a chance to use it, and as the years went by and my strength waned, I was not able to wield it. I guess the enemy saw that, and figured I wasn’t much of a threat to them. I still have it, and it is*

*right here.”* The soldier then drew the sword from its sheath, and it looked nearly new.

The commander paused for a moment and then said to the soldier, *“Well, I have decided that you should return to your unit and serve out the rest of your enlistment. There will be no retirement, no pension, no special honors, no medals and no special rewards. I just want you to report for regular duty in the morning.”* The soldier was disappointed, and even angered that his endurance of years of captivity was going to go unrecognized.

*“Well, am I going to be put in charge of training new troops? My experience would help them a lot.” “No,”* the commander said. *“I just want you to report back to your unit and join the other soldiers there. You need to return to regular soldiering and learn how to fight, and there will be no promotion.” “Why not?”* he asked. The commander replied, *“Because I gave you a sword, and I expected you to use it. You would not have been captured in the first place if you had taken your sword in your hand that day on the battlefield instead of leaving it in its sheath. Furthermore, you had it with you the whole time of your captivity. You could have fought your way out at any time.”*

*“No,”* the soldier said, *“it wasn’t like that. They were watching me constantly. If I had tried to use my sword, they would have all come upon me and overpowered me, and probably would have killed me. As long as I left that sword alone, they left me alone. The moment I would have picked it up and pointed it at them they would have torn me to pieces.”* The commander then asked the soldier, *“Let me ask you, did you ever notice your enemy very closely? Did you ever stop to see just exactly what you were up against?” “Sure,”* the soldier said, *“they are a great and menacing people. They can be terribly cruel when they want to be, and I can tell you from my own experience that the prisons in that land are built to be strong.”*

*“But did you ever look really closely at one of them? Did you ever look carefully at the enemy?” “What do you mean?”* said the soldier. *“I saw them every day. Of course I know what they look like!”*

The commander responded, *“I don’t think you looked closely at all, because if you had you would’ve noticed that not a single one of them carries a sword. There are no swords in that land. Between the enemy & us, ours is the only army that has swords.”*

***“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints”*** (**Ephesians 6:13-18**).

***“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”*** (**Hebrews 4:12**).