ON NIGHTMARES AND KNIGHTS
(What is a Man of God to do as He Faces the Present Chapter of History?)

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Many will not take the time to read this entirely as posts of this nature—that beckon viewers to "read more"—rarely tempt readers to use their finger/cursor to activate the link or scroll further to reveal the whole thought or larger offering beneath what the platform allows for instantly-viewable content. In many ways, columns like this no longer fit neatly into the high-frequency, fast-scrolling interfaces that programmers have created. However, for the curiously courageous looking for more than a dopamine hit or fantastical meme, I thought I'd share some of what God has been laying on my heart concerning how we (God's people in general and men of God in particular) ought to respond to the present age in which we live—an age where nightmares are real and far more frequent.

OF NIGHTMARES

In our world of diminishing attention spans (where complete thoughts are reduced to shorts that have been further redacted to memes), sensationally disjointed sound bites and unrelated reels can lead many to lose touch with the big picture and the larger story that the Lord is writing. Without a sense of this narrative and an understanding of our place in the narrative, we lose ourselves and can be undone by the episode that is right in front of us, particularly if that episode isn't turning out the way that we hoped it would or if the scene is unexpected, difficult, treacherous, or bleak. Malcolm Guite argues that a loss of a sense of story can "dismember" us from ourselves, the communities to which we belong, and the ancient promises that God has made for his people. When the present scene proves to be a nightmare, this tendency can leave

many discouraged, despairing, even depressed. However, *for God's people, the nightmare, no matter how terrifying, is not the whole story.*

Christians must remember the narrative to which they belong (a narrative of redemption and mission). They must recall the greatest protagonist ever to exist (the King of Kings and Lord of Lords—anticipated in the Old Testament, manifested in the Gospels, proclaimed in the Acts, explained in the epistles, and returning in glory in the Apocalypse). And they must hold fast to the promises that God has made. After all, the Author assures his own that he will never leave them nor forsake them (Heb 13:5) and that he is with them always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:20). The ultimate destination for believers includes a perfect place that Jesus Himself is even now preparing (Jn 14:2-3) and an unperishable inheritance to be enjoyed with Him forever (1 Pet 1:3-5). While in route to this glorious end, the people of God are told that God will supply all their needs (Phil 4:19) and work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Rom 8:28).

When the chapter we are currently traversing terrifies us, we must remember that every epic adventure contains trials as well as triumphs, villains as well as heroes, monsters as well as angels, evil as well as good. Each component moves the ark of the narrative forward to its ultimate end and the Divine Author can be trusted to finish His story well. This is why God's people are able to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb 10:23). When we remember the grand narrative of God, we will be keener to share it with a world that is starved for a good story—a world full of people that the Lord desires to see written into the unfolding chapters.

God's people need to familiarize themselves with this story, celebrate this story, find hope in this story, and enlist themselves as storytellers in a world plagued by nightmares. God's people must also assume their roles/responsibilities in this ancient and ongoing narrative. I believe, for the men among us, there is a special need and unique demand that the Lord would have them pursue in earnest.

OF KNIGHTS

Following this theme of ancient, yet relevant stories, there is an image (an unashamedly western, literary, and masculine archetype) that springs to mind when considering the virtues a Godly man ought to champion in God's unfolding tale: knights/knighthood. When you think of King Arthur's court and the round table, virtues of bravery, strength, stoicism, values of honor, nobility, and valor, qualities like faithfulness, loyalty, and chivalry, roles of provider and protector, and qualities like submissiveness to the king spring to mind. In many ways, these qualities reflect biblical principles to which men ought to pay careful attention. Consider these traits against what God's Word shares.

<u>Bravery/Strength/Stoicism</u>

"*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you*"-1 Peter 4:12

"*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us*"-Rom 8:18

"*For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison*"-2 Cor 4:17

"*Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong*"-1 Cor. 16:13

Honor/Nobility/Valor

"*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality"-Rom 12:9-13 "Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things*"-Heb 13:18

"*Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work*"-2 Tim 2:21

"*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered*"-1 Pet 3:7

Faithfulness/Loyalty/ /Chivalry

"*He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much*"-Lk 16:10

"*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*"-Eph 5:25

"*So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself*"-Eph 5:28

"…*be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*"-Rev 2:10

Protectors/Providers

"*Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses*"-Neh 4:14

"*But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*" -1 Tim 5:8

Submissive to the King

"*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*"-Matt 16:24

"*Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it*."-Ps 37:5

"*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body*"-1 Cor 6:19-20

"*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*"-Phil 5:5-8

While not all these verses apply exclusively to men, the godly man ought to lead the way in his home, among his peers, and within his community at championing what these verses teach. God's man can serve as a compelling character in the story that God is writing. When he is obedient to God's Word, he can be used by the Author to bring order to chaos, truth to confusion, a non-anxious presence in the struggle, a leading voice to the directionally challenged, peace to the problem, and hope to those residing in the sphere of influence he has been graced by the King to steward. This he must do when those he leads fall under attack and the nightmares disrupt the rest.

Thankfully, knights don't lead/struggle alone. They belong to a realm and have the backing of their King. Men of God are knights of the Lamb's table and as such stand shoulder to shoulder with those who choose not to neglect meeting together as is he habit of some, but instead spur each other to good works (Heb 10:24-25). These are those who shoulder each other burdens (Gal 6:2) and sharpen each other through committed accountability (Prov 27:17).

TAKE HEART CHILD OF GOD! TODAY IS NOT THE WHOLE STORY. GOD WINS (AND US WITH HIM IN THE END).

TAKE COURAGE MEN! YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE ONGOING ADVENTURE AS KNIGHTS OF THE LAMB'S TABLE. LOOK TO THE KING AND SEEK ENCOURAGEMENT FROM YOUR BROTHERS AROUND YOU.

Remembering these things helps bring the nightmares we face into subjection to the epic adventure that God is writing and bringing to a perfect end.