

VICTORY IN TIME
A Devotional Meditation from
Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Luke 7:1-10; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33
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Scotland Forever! is an iconic piece of military art painted by Lady Elizabeth Butler to commemorate the charge of the Royal Scots Greys cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815. At a critical moment, the Greys were sent in to stop a French attack that threatened to break through the British line. Their charge succeeded brilliantly, and the line was restored. Having accomplished their mission, they should have returned to their own lines to regroup and stand ready for the next action.

However, the Scottish troopers got caught up in the heat of the moment and pressed their attack forward all the way to the main enemy line, where veteran French infantry were ready to receive them. Outnumbered and disorganized, the Greys were soon beset by an attack of the French cavalry that chased them back to the safety of their own lines.



Scotland Forever! Lady Elizabeth Thompson Butler, [via Wikimedia Commons](#).

When it was all over, they had lost a third of their number, and their shattered formations were no longer fit for combat. The lack of effective cavalry nearly spelled defeat for the Allied army facing Napoleon Bonaparte. Their eventual victory at Waterloo ended Napoleon's imperial ambitions, but only after overcoming the tremendous setback brought on by the Scots Greys' impetuous disregard of orders.

Why did this happen? I surmise it was that the Scots Greys lost sight of the big picture. Having trained long and hard, and having waited for their moment in action, they forgot that their moment was but one in a series of moments in which each part of the army had to play its particular role in precisely the correct way so that victory could be achieved by all. No single soldier or unit could possibly understand the way it all had to fit together. Only the more senior among them even had any inkling of how to bring together the diverse parts of an army and make them dance. The master of the dance in that day, of course, was the Emperor Napoleon, but the Duke of Wellington was nearly his equal. It was Wellington alone who knew what his army had to do, both in the grand scheme, and in each moment. When the Scots Greys plunged ahead to their own destruction, they removed a powerful weapon from his hand, compelling him to revise his plan just to stave off defeat. As history records, Wellington did so – but only by the narrowest of margins.

What can the people of God learn from this? Let's begin by looking at a soldier whose story the gospel writers favorably reported: the Roman Centurion whose servant Yeshua healed. The account is in Luke 7:1-10:

When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. ²And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. ³When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; ⁵for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." ⁶Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; ⁷for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." ⁹Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." ¹⁰When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Luke 7:1-10 NASB)

Those with military experience recognize the elements of this story. We who are or have been soldiers know that authority is key to what we do, how we live, and who we are. Authority provides direction, order, and organization. Where authority is absent, or where respect for authority is lacking, there is confusion.

In this story we see that the Centurion recognized Yeshua as one with great authority – even greater than his own. The typical Roman officer would not have recognized such authority, but this man was a God-fearing Gentile who loved the Jewish people because he loved their God. That's why he decided not to trouble Rabbi Yeshua with something so insignificant and offensive as coming to his house to perform the miracle. He understood that, as a Jew, Yeshua might not be willing to enter a Gentile's home, so he sought to avoid offense and preserve the rabbi's honor. As one of authority himself, he knew Yeshua could be trusted. After all, a soldier gains authority only by proving himself or herself trustworthy. His request was simply for healing for his beloved servant, not that the Master stoop so low as to come visit his home. Upon hearing that Yeshua was on his way, he sent friends to clarify the request, trusting Yeshua to be able to do whatever he asked if he were willing. That is why the Messiah spoke so favorably of him.

This seems counterintuitive, though. At other times, Yeshua walked into a home and laid hands on the sick. Why not now? Probably because he recognized the need of the moment. Rushing in where he was not welcome would not have helped the situation. The Centurion would have welcomed him, but the Jewish citizens of Galilee and Judea would have taken great offense at his entering a Gentile's house. That would have set back his ministry significantly. The Centurion understood this, and thus took steps to remove the potential for offense.

This is the lesson for us all. We have the greatest news in the world: redemption in Messiah Yeshua, relationship with our Creator, both now and in eternity, and we should be eager to share it, but sometimes sharing it can be counterproductive. If, like the Scots Greys, we get caught up in the heat of the moment and lose sight of the big picture, we could cause greater harm than good. For example, I know two people who would have turned a cold shoulder to any would-be evangelist, and their backs on God, had anyone

tried to direct them in the path of righteousness at certain points in their lives. One is now a pastor, but as a young man he trafficked in drugs. He says the best thing that God could have done for him was let him be arrested, convicted, and thrown in prison. It was there that he came to his senses, and came into relationship with the Almighty through Messiah Yeshua. The other person is now a Christian counselor and speaker, but for many years she was a militant lesbian who lived in domestic partnership with another woman. The Lord used many people in her life to bring her to healing and deliverance, including a counselor who built a relationship with her. She knew exactly when to sit back and listen, when to prod, and when to challenge my friend to take another hard step toward freedom. In both cases, the process took many years, with many people who played their parts at precisely the right moments – and then let God do the rest in His time.

Timing is key, of course. Solomon explains that in the famous passage from Ecclesiastes 3 that begins, “There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.” We remember that part, but we may not remember how Solomon concludes that poetic exhortation:

He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 NASB)

What does he mean? I think he is telling us that God has put a longing for eternal life in our very DNA, but He has withheld the knowledge of how everything works, and when everything will come to pass. Our job is simply to obey, but to obey we must understand how. That is why we study, meditate on, and discuss the Word of God, seeking to apply it in our daily lives. That is how we learn when to act, and when to refrain – but always to pray. A good soldier knows his or her job, but the best soldiers know their places in the line. They know where their responsibility ends, and the responsibility of another begins. Obedience tempered by experience gives the best soldiers the understanding that they cannot do everything, but their part, faithfully executed and joined with the contributions of others, will bring victory in time.