

## HOLD THE FORT

**8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10 Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (Exodus 17:8-13)**

Beloved in the Lord,

Last year I read about a battle that happened in Atlanta Georgia in 1864. A small group of soldiers were defending a fort against a very powerful enemy. This Fort was strategically vital and the loss of this position would be catastrophic. Things were not looking too good. Some of the leaders had already fallen and many were critically wounded. The onslaught was unrelenting. It seemed that the battle would soon be over. Suddenly one of the soldiers saw a signal flag across the way. The message was clear: "Hold the Fort, I am coming. General Sherman." Buoyed by this message the men held out for another three hours until the General and his army joined them and saved the day.

This particular event inspired Philip Bliss to write a song in 1870 entitled: "Hold the Fort, for I am coming. The chorus of the song says: *"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still; Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."*

I love this song and it inspires me very often. As Christians we are to hold the fort. Our General – Jesus is coming back.

We live in difficult times, especially in a spiritual sense. The enemy is great and powerful. We are constantly under attack from many different directions. What we must keep in mind is that our General has already won the war and He will return to claim complete and total victory.

On Good Friday Jesus went to battle against sin, death and the devil. At 3.00pm that day Jesus said: "It is finished." He then breathed His last breath. It seemed that the forces of darkness had prevailed. They took his bruised and battered body off the cross and laid it in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. The disciples had fled. What now?

That was Friday. They had not yet understand what Jesus had told them. Friday was necessary but Sunday was coming. In the grief of Friday they forgot Sunday was coming.

Sunday morning arrived and with the first rays of light came the great news, the best news – HE IS RISEN. Jesus is alive. The tomb could not hold Him. He is alive for evermore. For 40 days Jesus remained on this earth and then He ascended to His Father in Heaven. He left saying that He will return.

In the mean time He left the disciples a commission, which is also our commission today. That is best given to us in Matthews Gospel: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt.28:18-20)

The great commission is the work of the Christian Church. We are to make disciples of all peoples, teaching them to live for and to obey Jesus.

The problem is that the Christian message never has been and never will be a popular message. We are sent to proclaim the good news in a spiritually hostile environment. We have an enemy who is cunning, smart and powerful.

But please understand, if we stay close to Jesus, abiding in Him, and if we remain firm in His Word, then victory is ours.

That brings us to our text for today. We read about a battle between the Amalekites and Israel. Moses sent Joshua into battle and he himself took up a position on the mountain overlooking the valley where the battle took place. He stood with the staff of God raised above his head. This staff was a symbol of God's presence, power and His Word.

Today our staff is the Bible, the true and living Word of God. While Moses held the staff up Joshua prevailed, but when he lowered it the Amalekites prevailed.

Seeing this Aaron and Hur came side by side with Moses. They propped up Moses weary hand and supported him, so that he could hold his position. Victory was theirs that day.

What does this mean for us today?

I believe that God is teaching us that as a congregation, as a Church we must hold our position – hold the fort. We must uphold God's Word. We must raise the Bible high above all else.

If we do not do this our enemy will gain the upper hand. This has been the case throughout Church history. When Christians do not hold God's Word as top priority, erosion occurs, the foundations wash away in the sea of compromise, in the flow of the times and eventually the whole thing collapses.

That was the case in Luther's time. Thankfully he did not yield, but like Moses stood his ground. Luther stood firmly on the Word of God. He did so in the face of fierce and powerful opposition. He stood on God's Word. "Here I stand, I can do no other." As it was in Luther's day, so today we need Christians who will maintain the position, hold the Fort. We need pastors and congregation members who say: "Here I stand – I can do no other." We need to be convinced, have conviction. We need to be on fire for God, we need to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that all else will be added unto us.

Today on the day of our AGM, I renew my commitment to Hold the Fort no matter what. How effectively I will be able to do that depends a great deal on you, because it is vital that you understand that this congregation is not a one man show, but it is our congregation. As Moses wearied toiling on his own, so will any pastor without support. Please be clear this is our Church. More correctly it is Jesus' Church, but we are the custodians.

We are given orders not only to Hold the Fort, but to actively engage in proclaiming and fighting for the Truth of the Gospel. Our work is by no means done. There are many Latvians who have yet to hear or respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There are so many living in sin and darkness, bound by the devil.

For so many of our own Latvian Community, the way to Latvian house is smooth, but the path to Church is rough and difficult. Isn't that true? So many get excited about Latvian politics, but care little for the Kingdom of God. I think that the fact that the 18<sup>th</sup> of November Commemorations draw more people to Latvian House than Good Friday or Easter services to Church says something very significant. I find it interesting that the very people who make excuses and tell me – I can't get to Church, find their way to Latvian House.

It is not a matter of being able, but desire. Please understand I am not having a go at anybody, but merely trying to underscore the fact that we have before us a great challenge. The mission field is right here.

Hymn writer: Janis Ermanis writes: *“Christians it's time to awake and mobilise for the Holy battle. Do not be lukewarm any longer. Lift up your eyes and see, sin and evil will tell you that many are as dead. Come forth love and bring life to them, that they may rise and songs of praise may resound in their souls, In those who bear God's image.”*

That is a rough but literal translation of his song. Let us heed his cry to shake off the luke warmness. Just think about it. What if Moses had been lukewarm and without support? He would have given up when he grew tired, and the Amalekites would have prevailed. What if that group of men in Atlanta had been lukewarm? They would have given up before the General arrived and a lot would have been lost.

Let us warm up and be on fire for God. Let us glow for Jesus and His Kingdom. Let us be clear that the person who is not in Christ is lost, not only here but also eternally. Let us be clear that the battle is for eternal souls.

Jesus died on Calvary, He shed His innocent blood so that no man would have to be eternally banished from His presence in outer darkness. The Gospel is simple:

***<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18)***

Today on the day of our AGM, I urge you, encourage you, invite you, plead with you, stand with me. Hand in hand and side by side with our eyes on Jesus may we stand on His Word Alone. We will hold the fort and do all we can in His strength to save our people from eternal darkness.

**Amen.**

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.