

## Knights

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By Chris Carlson

Ever since I was a youth I watched as the knights around me fought to defend our town. Even though the attacks were large and fierce we were able to easily withstand them because of the great wall the leaders of our town had built to protect us. In our town we had only a few strong and experienced knights, and many weaker and less capable knights. The strong led and organized the weaker, and thus, with the help of our wall, we were able to fend off most attacks with a minimum of casualties. Each knight was responsible for a section of the wall. He didn't just defend it, he trained by it, he repaired it, and he strengthened it. These were a part of his duties. Sections of the wall were also allotted to families. Thus, entire families could care for whole sections of the wall. This allowed for brothers to defend brothers, fathers to defend sons, and grandsons to defend fathers. You not only fought to defend your town, you fought to defend your family. If the enemy broke through the wall your family was the first to go. Whole families could be torn apart and destroyed.

This system works well as long as everyone does their part. However, when I was young, the enemy concentrated their attack on the part of the wall protecting my house. The knights did their best, but they fell. The wall was destroyed. My family fell for my parents were weak. My parents were torn apart forever and I was taken as a prisoner to the enemy camp. Interestingly enough, things actually appeared to be better there than where I was. I had no family anymore, but I could satisfy all my desires. I could do anything I wanted so long as I actively attacked that from which I came. Being young and not having wisdom I did just that. I satisfied every lust and desire I encountered whenever I wanted. I was like a savage beast as I made war against my town's folk. In time I grew cold to the stench of my cruelty. I myself thought nothing of tearing apart families and children. I myself, engaged in unspeakable acts that are so unholy that to merely think of speaking them would once again defile my heart.

The horror I caused soon reached the top ranks of my legion. As a result of this they started considering me for promotion and my superiors tested me with horrific tests. Men, Women, and Children were all victims in the worst ways. They tested me in ways even more unspeakable than before. Finally, after years of cruelty I was let in. I would be apprentice to one of the elite Dark Nights. I would learn how to lead other dark warriors against the forces of light. We raided whole cities. Walls fell on their builders like burning meteors from the sky. Their houses burned like match sticks. Not just families, but whole clans were destroyed. Broken, after generations of valiant effort and struggle to survive. The more I rose in this dark order, the more of myself I forgot. The more I forgot my mother's great cooking. The more I forgot my brother's and sisters playing in the soft grass. The more I forgot the loving but firm hand of my father. I soon came to think dark. I ate, drank, breathed, and lived all that was evil.

Finally, when I was a young man my dark mentor recommended me for knighthood. I fought well and without conscience. Even as an apprentice the people of the light knew of me. Though it was hardly for the mercy I showed them. Rather, it was for the delight I took in causing pain. The dark master considered my mentors request and granted me knighthood. My bloodlust grew without restriction. I was given my own legion of dark warriors and given a list of quotas. The

Master of Darkness needed materials such as iron and wood. He needed supplies such as water and food. He needed tools and people to produce them. He needed weapons of all shapes and sizes. But what he needed the most was more fighting forces for his planned assault on the Capitol of Light.

My dark master sent me out into the world and I filled quotas easily. I even won the award for cruelty in action. However, there was one quota that no one had been able to fulfill. He needed warriors, plain and simple. The Capitol of Light was a formidable fortress. The power of the Master of Light was superior to our Master of Darkness's power, but we were convinced that if we could overwhelm them on a concentrated spot, we could break through their walls and thus defeat the Master of Light. My dark master's recon troops found several large cities of light that were full of new births, young children, and weak warriors. Perfect for the taking. Our plan was simple. Take everything and leave nothing to waste. We would raise the children in our dark ways and harden them in battle against their own kind. We would force the adults into slavery to produce weapons and other goods. This would swell our forces to a size respectable enough to take on the Capitol of Light. We made our battle arrangements and we left for war. After traveling through our conquered lands pride swelled in my heart. I thought of all the awards I had received and all that I would receive once the Capitol of Light had fallen. Secretly, I longed to entice my evil desires without the responsibility of leadership and the work of war. Yet, being enslaved with my bloodlust I marched on vigorously.

Soon we reached a position suitable to make war against the first of the large cities of light. I immediately set about entrenching my troops because in the past, the forces of light have tried to strike preemptively. They often did so with some measure of success. I sent a few troops to scope out the city in an attempt to gain information about where the best place to strike may be. Word came back that the walls were strong and as tall as fifty men. However, their city had no gates. My curiosity was peaked. How can a city this size exist without gates to protect it? I sent my spies back to find out why and when they came back the answer would astonish me. They relied on the Master of Light to protect them. Or at least that's what the people honestly believed. My men came back with stories of attacks that could do no damage because the Master of Light stood in their way. He fought for them. I had never fought the Master of Light before and I knew he was more powerful than my Dark Master. But, I also knew that most of his troops were still in the Capitol of Light. I thought to myself, "I may have a chance of overwhelming them!" Yet, I sought the wisdom of the Dark Master on the matter. He sent some of his elite Dark Temple Knights to aid me in my evil quest. We developed a plan. We would distract them at their rear while plunging en masse through their door-less gates.

The armies of darkness rose early that morning to dress for war. Because this was my command, I had the Chief Dark Temple Knight lead the other Dark Temple Knights to the rear for the distraction. Their deception skills would aid them greatly in this task. I of course reserved the glory of being the first to enter the soon to be fallen city of light for myself. At daybreak we would attack. Except, things started going wrong right away. As we approached the city we noticed that it began to glow a bright white. It soon became almost blinding. Never the less, we pushed on toward certain victory. When we got near the city, we could see that the walls weren't actually glowing but that the light inside was so bright that it was actually overshadowing the

walls. When we got to the gates, though nearly blinded, we cried out “Death to the light!” and charged through the gates.

I myself took my best men and ran into the town square looking for this Master of Light I had heard so much about. It wasn't long before I found him. Or rather, he found me. He was clothed in white and he emanated glory and power like nothing I had ever seen before. He looked down to me and said my name. Not the warrior name that I had earned through countless horrific acts, but my real name. The name my parents gave me. I dropped my weapon and fell to my knees as my mind raced back to when I was a youth. I remembered my brothers and sisters. I remembered my mother holding me in her arms after I scraped my knee. I remembered my father's heart. I remembered love. Suddenly my heart was filled with this thing called love. I felt compassion for everyone around me.

Then I broke in pain as my heart experienced the pain I had caused. I was broken. I could no longer think evil thoughts. They were no longer pleasurable. I loathed them as much as I once loathed the light. My guilt overwhelmed me as I begged for the mercy I knew I didn't deserve. The mercy I never granted others. Then the Master of Light said a few words that I will never forget, “You have caused much pain and done much evil, yet someone has already suffered for your guilt. You deserve to die for your evil, but someone has died in your place.” I could hardly conceive of whom or what or why. I would then find out that the Master of Light has a Son who suffered and died so that I wouldn't have to. The Master of Light then explained that he then brought his Son out of death so that his Son may conquer the forces of darkness once and for all. Upon hearing this, my heart grew to understand true love. I understood that true love is to love before you are loved.

My eyes began draining themselves before the Master of Light as my heart and my mind were overcome with the truth of what had just happened to me. I begged the Master of Light to let me serve him instead. I knew there was no way I could go back to the Master of Darkness. I wanted to stand for light in a dark world. I told him of the plans that my old master had for the Capitol of Light. My new master just smiled and said, “I know, and you will fight in the great battle. But first, comes training” Now, I was more than a little confused. I was the best that darkness had to offer. Why would I need more training? Upon querying my new master he explained that I had new weapons now. I had to leave my old weapons behind. I now would fight according to a different rulebook, with a different sword, and under a different flag. I applied myself as I had before. I learned to use my new double-edged sword. I learned how my new master wanted me to fight evil with love. It struck me as odd at first, but when I saw how well it worked I was hooked. I soon became proficient at this new way battling.

Yet, my job wasn't just to war against evil, but to mend what evil had caused. In some cases, I was asked to mend the very walls I had broken down. When the people whom I had hurt saw me coming in my armor of light, they began to rejoice. I was puzzled because I had expected mistrust. I once again questioned my master only to find out that the real battle isn't about fighting or about conquests. It's about mending hearts, just as he had mended mine. He had mended theirs a long time ago and so they knew when their master had been at work in someone.

In one case, after rebuilding their wall and strengthening their defenses, we had a large party. We celebrated all that our master had done for us. I found out that many of them were also enslaved in a dark blood lust until the light freed them. We became close and I learned to love in ways I didn't know existed. They brought me under their wing and I continued my training as a Warrior of the Light. In them I found a new family. A family that would in some ways take the place of my old family. The one that had been viciously torn apart. I stayed and worked, and loved, and even in time taught and trained. I was even able to help train an ex-Dark Temple Knight to love more deeply and completely. I was eventually entrusted with the safe keeping of this city. Life took on a whole new meaning and dimension.

Then, early one morning the alarms went off. Everyone was scurrying about and getting ready to defend the city. A horde of dark warriors had amassed outside our city gates. I, as the one entrusted with this city, didn't know exactly what to do. They outnumbered us ten to one. So, I called on my Master. I called on the Master of Light to defend us. He ordered me to open the city gates and let them in. If it had not been for my conversion experience, I would have thought he was crazy. But, I did as he said and prayed for my life. I didn't want to go back to living the life I had been living before. I would rather die a horrible and painful death than do so. The Master of Light told us all to stand behind him for protection. We all scrambled to get behind our master. As I saw the dark hordes rush in my heart broke, but not from fear. For the man who led them was my younger brother. I had figured him gone forever. I fell to my knee's in tears begging my master to do for him what he's done for me. My master then, as though he had many hands, reached out and touched almost all their hearts. But he seemed to not touch others. I couldn't understand why, especially because my brother was one of those left untouched. He ran back towards his dark master. While most of his evil brethren became warriors of light, he did not. My master turned and said, "Just as I freed you, I will free him. But the time is not yet right for him to be free."

As much as it hurt, I knew I had to trust my master so I applied myself to the work my master gave me to do. My city thrived and I started a family. I had children of my own, and even found a few relatives. I busied myself with my master's work, and tried not to think about the darkness my brother was in. Then, one day, the Master of Light spoke to me. His orders were to draw out the armies of darkness for battle. He knew I would know where to go and how to do this. I was once a Dark Knight, in charge of a dreadful legion. I immediately put together a crack team of leaders. One of which was my own son. We formulated a plan, gathered supplies, and left our city. We were ready to war with weapons of mercy, forgiveness, hope, and love. We left with a purpose on our minds and love in our hearts.

My army of light was well trained and well provided for. We marched with confidence and hopeful expectation. Our first battle was really just a skirmish. The enemy had a small legion of dark warriors and one dark knight preparing to destroy a small town of light on the outskirts of our borders. They fell easily and all of them became warriors of light. Realizing that this war would be won by increasing our ranks every time we fought, I began to put some of my knights in charge of training the knights and warriors who had been recently freed from the darkness. My army constantly trained even when we weren't fighting. We learned to work together in using our weapons of mercy, forgiveness, hope, and love.

We marched through the enemy countryside, retaking town after town. Many battles were very emotional for me because I knew I was freeing a town that in my youth I had enslaved to darkness. Our ranks swelled as we went deeper into enemy territory. After performing a census of my army I found that it had doubled in size. So I began making preparations for dividing my army in two. My thought was simple. Cover twice as much ground and rejoin if necessary. This worked incredibly well. We had two large armies that were constantly growing and resettling lost territory. We pushed enemy territory back to the river of hate, a river that flowed with the blood of the enemies of darkness. The only problem was that we could not cross this river. It is known that whoever touches this river is filled with a deep blood lust. I would not let all that the forces of light had worked for turn into an instrument of the Master of Darkness. So, I called on my master. He said wait and I will show you what to do. We were faithful and we waited. The hours turned to days, which turned to weeks, then months. My army was getting homesick and the horror that lay just beyond the river of hate was starting to get to us. Yet, we kept ourselves busy by training and refining our skills. We continued to grow every time the Master of Darkness tried to break through. Then one day came a very clever attack on the part of the enemy. When they would attack, they would take buckets and gather from the river of hate. They would then splash as many warriors of light as possible. Instantly creating in them a blood lust. But, though we were kept busying fighting our own kind, our ranks still continued to grow. The power of the Master of Light continued to free both those with the newfound blood lust and the dark warriors that attacked. We stood strong and ready, though confused as to why we had to wait.

Then the day arrived. The Master of Light sent word that the army of Darkness was getting ready to launch a massive attack and take back the ground they had lost. Of course, their first objective was to get rid of us, as we were their only real threat in the region. I ordered my troops to double the number of guards that were watching for flash raids. I sent word to all the towns to begin building up their defenses. I readied my army for a huge battle. A battle that would be larger than any other I had ever seen. It took the enemy a few days to arrive and amass their troops, but when they had finished it was truly a terrible sight. They were just on the other side of the river of hate, taunting us and ridiculing us. And there in the center of it all, was my brother. He was training and preparing his dark warriors to attack. The sight of this made me sad that I would have to fight my brother. For, my heart had only grown for him. I so wanted his heart to be mended, but I didn't know what to do. So, has had become my custom I sought the advice of my master. The Master of Light said, "Do you remember his name?" I replied, "Yes sir, I do." The Master of light then said, "But he doesn't. Tell him just as I told you what yours was. I will take care of the rest." With such heavy feelings on my heart I forced myself to get some rest.

We awoke early the next morning because recon had tipped us off that the enemy was planning to attack that day. We bunkered down and waited for them. After a few hours we heard a distant cry. It sounded like someone had taunted a million lions and they were all roaring at once. The sound chilled the very blood that kept us alive, but we would not lose faith. We would not lose faith in our master nor his weapons of choice. We listened carefully as the roar grew louder and louder assuming that meant they were getting closer and closer. Then suddenly over the horizon we saw the dark hordes rushing toward us. We braced our selves for the onslaught as they rushed across the river of hate. Then the two sides clashed with a loud thud. I fought hard with

the weapons that my master had given me. We were holding our own and I knew that this would be a close battle. Then I saw him. I saw my brother and he was fighting my son. I ran to them as fast as I could to save my son from my brother but I was too late. My brother's sword of hate was too strong. My son lay dead. He was strong but wasn't yet in his prime. My heart began to swell, but unexpectedly not with anger. My heart began to swell with an overwhelming sense of joy and love. My brother ran towards me, recognizing my rank, and ran his sword through my heart. My response to my brother was not what either of us expected. As I lay on the ground and he walked away I called out his name. The name his parents had given him. I saw him drop to his knees and start weeping. After a few short minutes, with my last strength I said, "Brother, I love you and I forgive you. You are now freed from the bloodlust that once held me captive. Seek the Master of Light and fight with the new weapons he gives you." I then closed my eyes and accepted death.

After what seemed like a short afternoon nap, I awoke in a field that looked untouched by war or evil. After getting up and looking around I realized that there were a countless number of people all around me and they looked like they had just been awoken as well. I sought out who was in charge. They pointed to the master of light who was hard at work raising more people out of the dust of the field. I was at first surprised at the power he held to reinstate life. But then I remembered what he told me he had done for his own Son. Why should I be surprised that he could do that for us? I started asking around to find out what was going on and who had won the battle. I found out the battle I died in happened over two millennia ago and that we successfully, though barely, withstood the dark onslaught. I was filled with a certain amount of pride in my troops. They won the day and that's something that would fill any leader with a certain amount of satisfaction. It is truly an awesome thing when those under you succeed. But, I had more questions, what happens next. The word from those around me was that we were preparing for the great battle. This was the battle that would once and for all decide what and who would rule the universe. Would it be good or would it be evil. We all rejoiced that the day of our master was finally near, but inside I was still curious about what had happened to my brother. Was his heart really mended? Did he fight for the light? As I sat there pondering what might have happened to my brother I heard my name. I was filled with a great joy when I turned around and saw my brother. We talked and rejoiced in the fact that the Master of Light had mended both our hearts. We rejoiced even further as we shared about our families and the conquests we made for the kingdom of light. And, as brothers should, we both fought in the great battle together.