

## The General Who Tried to Dictate to God

Once upon a time there was an army General. His country had won a war that was like no other war. It has been against a country that had never before been defeated. This General was the biggest hero of his country because he had led the final battle that had led to victory. The General had become pretty arrogant because of this, and more and more he grew to believe that he was invincible.

After the General retired, he was still a famous and honored man. And he continued to live life as he pleased, not ceasing to order people around, just as he had done with his army. Everyone had to follow his commands, and do his bidding. However, one day, the General became quite ill. He was put into the hospital, and prognosis was not good. As his pain increased and he became weaker and weaker, he gradually came to realize that he was not long for this world. He began to think about God, wondering if what his atheist training had told him were true. Was there really no God, as he had been told? Well, it was *probably* true, but how could he find out for sure? He guessed that if there really were a God, He would surely have to respond if he challenged him. So (after he made sure that no one could hear him), he called out, "God, if you really exist, and you can hear me, heal me on Christmas Day. I will only believe you if you heal me *on* Christmas Day – not a day before or a day after. It must be on the day." (Since the General had been used to giving orders, he thought nothing of dictating to God as well.) And he was arrogantly sure that God would "have" to follow his instructions if He really existed. At this time, it was ten days before Christmas.

After he finished calling out, he felt quite silly, because all the 72 years of his life he had just taken it for granted that there was no God. And he had often made fun of people who had believed the silly notion of a God. However, he guessed that since he was about to die, he couldn't lose anything by calling out. He wouldn't even suffer humiliation! He was positive that no one heard his silly words, so no one would even call him crazy. If God didn't exist, nothing would happen, and he would soon die and be in the grave.

The surgeons decided they had to at least *try* to save this famous hero's life. They knew that there was a good possibility that he wouldn't survive surgery. But they felt they must take that chance if there would be any hope at all. So they scheduled surgery for the next day. The nurses prepped the General and were wheeling him to the surgery room, when suddenly the "awful truth" hit him: "Now I *know* there is no God. It is nine days before Christmas. After this surgery, I will either be healed or die. I told God to heal me on Christmas Day if He really existed. If I am healed before Christmas, it will prove there is no God. And if I die, that will also prove there is no God." Just as he had this depressing thought, the surgeons were called to do an emergency surgery on someone else. So an orderly wheeled the General back to his room and his surgery was postponed. He changed his mind. "Well...maybe there is a God after all. We'll see."

The next day, the General was again prepped for surgery. "Well, God cannot be real. I will either be well today or I will die. He isn't able to meet my challenge. There must not be a God." But again, there was an interruption before he got to the surgery room. And again, the General said, "Well, maybe."

The same thing happened six more times before Christmas! The General vacillated from “knowing” that the idea of a God was false, to saying, “Well, maybe God is real.”

On the day before Christmas, the General had an idea. Maybe he could bribe a doctor to do the surgery on Christmas Day. He told a doctor that he would give him a large sum of money if he would do the surgery tomorrow. But the doctor just laughed. “You won’t find any surgeon who’s willing to operate on Christmas Day. We all have plans with our families. Sorry.”

The next day the General’s condition deteriorated rapidly and he was hooked to monitors. Some of his organs started to shut down and he was sure that death would come soon. But a pastor had heard that the famous General was dying and he wanted to pray for him. Nurses told the pastor that he could have only five minutes to visit, because the General was very sick. The pastor came and prayed a simple prayer, but nothing seemed to happen. Disappointed, the General said gruffly, “Are you finished? Then get out of here!” The pastor started to leave, but before he could get down the hall, the alarms began to sound on the General’s monitor, warning that the heart had stopped. A nurse noticed that a stranger was leaving the room, and at first she thought that the stranger might have killed him. Then she remembered that his condition was quite serious, and it wouldn’t be unusual if he died. When she got to the room, there were only flat lines on the monitor. He was dead.

Doctors and nurses gathered around and tried CPR to resuscitate him. They tried shocking the heart and everything they knew how to do. They persistently kept at it for 55 minutes. But there was no response. It was hopeless, and they finally gave up.

Incredibly, however, a few minutes later (after more than 55 minutes!), he opened his eyes and moved his head. An orderly who was making preparations to move the body saw the “dead body” come to life. He screamed. Nurses and doctors came running back into the room. Someone shouted, “It’s a ghost! Somebody tie him up!”

“What day is this?” the “ghost” asked. There was a shocked pause, and several people answered at once. “*It’s Christmas.*”

“There must be a God! There is a God! There *is* a God! He has healed me! I believe in Him! He’s *real!*”

That day this former atheist Communist General gave his life to the One True God and Jesus His Son who had so graciously healed him on Christmas Day.

This is not the end of the story. (And as incredible as it sounds, this is a *true* story!) We personally visited this “ghost” nearly six years after that Christmas in 2002 on which he had been dead for 55 minutes. The 78 year old General that we met was very much alive! And he glowed with *new life* in Jesus. You may have guessed that he had been the Communist General of the Viet Cong Army, the very one who led the assault on Saigon that ended the war and left North Vietnam victorious. But he’s a different man now from the one who had commanded the army. God has changed his whole life!

Soon after he became a Christian, God spoke to him in his heart, “I want you to make your house a house of prayer. Open it up so that people can come here to pray.”

“But God,” he argued, “This is a private home! If people want to come together to pray, they can rent a hall. It’s a lot of work to have people at your home. You have to clean it and serve food and drink. Hospitality isn’t my talent, God.”

“Don’t worry, I will reward you. Just do what I tell you, and you will see.”

So the General rather reluctantly obeyed. People started coming to his home to pray. Every few weeks he would impatiently ask, “God, I’m obeying. Where is my reward?”

One day he felt that the Lord wanted him to go to the airport. He wasn’t planning a trip, so he couldn’t imagine why. There was a crowd gathered near the X-ray machines. Several security guards were shouting at some Chinese visitors, who didn’t seem to understand. Since the General had spent a couple of years in China, he was fluent in the language and offered to interpret. It turns out that these wealthy Chinese businessmen had bought a huge piece of solid jade over five feet high as a striking decoration for their executive office building. It was carved with beautiful scenery and was a work of art worth millions! Because of the immense value and weight, the airlines refused to take responsibility. They wouldn’t allow them to take it on the plane as they returned to China. They had to leave today and they didn’t know what to do. So the General offered to take the piece home and take care of it for them, until they arranged other transportation. A few months later they called and told him that, because of laws about transporting cultural pieces across national borders, they had to leave the beautiful jade in Vietnam. So they wanted to *give* it to him! That moment, he realized that this gorgeous piece of art was God’s reward to him for making his house a house of prayer! He put it in a lighted glass case in the middle of his living room for all to see. All honor and glory belongs to the Lord!

At first, we were amused at the way that the General had dedicated his art piece to Jesus. He had draped a cheap, shiny red strand of plastic beads around this exquisite jade work of art with the greeting in large plastic letters, “Merry Christmas!!!”

But then we humbly remembered that for the last five years, the words “Merry Christmas” have held an incredibly deep and sacred meaning for the General!

Merry Christmas, *indeed!* Life from a dead body! New life in the Spirit. Life that reflects the tremendous mercy of God! Life that reflects the love of a God who stooped down to meet a seeker’s challenge. Life dedicated to serving the Living God. Life, instead of darkness and futility. Life obedient to the King of Live. Life that keeps on producing more new life, even after bodies die. Merry Christmas. Merry *CHRIST-mas!*



