**The Past is Gone – Let’s Move Forwards (Joshua 1:1-9)**

*The Battle of Vartanants is an example to us of obedience to God; we are called as believers to forget our old life and move forwards with Christ towards our God-pleasing future.*

Greetings to you dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you who are the generations coming from the Battle of Vartanants who stand here bearing the name of Christ by the price of His blood. If we think for a moment about it, the occasion of Vartanants represents to us the war for faith in both our corporate and personal lives. If the Battle of Vartanants had not happened, no one knows what our plight would be as an Armenian nation. Would we still be worshipping the True God or would we have returned to our pagan past? General Vartan and his heroic soldiers knew full well that their numbers were low as they prepared for the battle on the fields of Avarayr that fateful day. However, they were ready to pay any price not to return back to slavery and bondage, because that threat was not just of an economic bondage; it was also one of a return to spiritual ignorance and surrender back to spiritual darkness. They decided to obey God, rather than men… They decided not to look backwards, but to move forwards and walk with their Savior, even if that decision would lead to the loss of some of their lives. Today’s topic is exactly about that forwards-motion. When God was encouraging Joshua not to fear and to be strong, He knew that he would encounter adversaries; but the Lord required an obedient heart – one that was not afraid of the dangers of the past lifestyle, but rather one that put its trust in Him who is Ever-Accompanying and The All-Powerful Lord God. Therefore, God invites us precisely to this trust. Thus, today we will speak about leaving the past and moving forwards with God’s help. The Battle of Vartanants is an example to us of obedience to God; we are called as believers to forget our old life and move forwards with Christ towards our God-pleasing future. Let’s speak about this great calling, then…

God is with you – don’t look back, but rather, go forth toward the fulfillment of His Promises. Dearly beloved, it is very easy to read Joshua’s story today. We might suppose that it was very simple for him to follow Moses while he himself was just a plain servant to his lord. We can easily forget just how meek Moses was – a human being living on an altogether different level of life… Up until today, even, the Jewish nation would consider Moses the greatest figure in their history. There is no one who receives the same level of honor or high reputation in the Old Testament. In the same way, we could easily take for granted the annual remembrance and commemoration of the Battle of the Heroes of Vartanants, especially forgetting that they were knowingly preparing to fight a battle leading to certain death. The question is, what does the Vartanants heroes’ entrance into battle say to us (today)? The soldiers and their superiors all took communion before going in. Yes, it is true that their sins were forgiven by their allegiance to Christ and confession of sin, but they all showed their solidarity on that day in Christ in that moment by declaring themselves as Christ’s People once again. They showed it by displaying their obedience to the Savior’s command to “do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.”

In the same spirit, Joshua also prepared to enter the land of Canaan, instructing and stirring up the armies of the Israelites to advance into God’s promised lands in order to occupy the lands that God had promised the people, to fulfill and realize His goals for them. As we see throughout the book of Joshua, the people of God were indeed able to establish itself because of Joshua’s perfectly obedient heart in leading them. In the case of the soldiers of Vartanants, their self-sacrifice became their sign of perfect obedience to God. When we read that they responded to the threatening letter by the Persian monarch with “our necks, your sword”, we have here a complete willingness to go forwards with God (rather than our own logic or plans).

Let’s think for a moment about our own personal lives: for the sake of our health, we leave behind many bad habits such as smoking, eating heavy meals, or even sometimes wrong relationships. We do all these so that our lives would improve overall.

The Battle of Vartanants and the Entrance of Joshua into the Promised Land give us reason to pause and to consider the following challenge put in front of us: Do we move forth in life with full devotion and obedience to God? Have we said to the devil, “our necks, your sword” when the battle of temptations has raged? Or have we given in to the deceptions of this world which take us to selfishness and final hell? Have we prepared ourselves like Joshua to go forth and take hold of our next spiritual Promised Land? Ours is the ever-maturing and strengthening life of faith in Jesus. It is that life that has many spiritual territories and strongholds for us to conquer. In one word, God, through the examples of Joshua’s Entrance and the Battle of Vartanants, is inviting us to spiritual fearlessness and courage. Are you ready to give your life to Jesus, to personally enjoy and let coming generations experience a life of intimacy with Him? Can you, like Joshua, say to those around you, “Come and let us strengthen our spiritual lives to increase our spiritual victories?”

God is saying to us today: Do not fear; go forth in your spiritual battle, because I am with you and you will reach My goal for you if you trust Me and My Word. God is inviting us to trust Him at any price, so that we may experience the best life that He desires for us, one that walks with Him and grows in an everlasting intimacy with Him; to walk in a way that glorifies Him. The Battle of Vartanants is an example to us of obedience to God; we are called as believers to forget our old life and move forwards with Christ towards our God-pleasing future.

May God give us the courage today, at this moment, to devote ourselves to Him and to go forth and experience the fulfillment of His Promises. God Bless You. Amen.