

A Christmas Story: Valley Forge, 1776



"At Valley Forge, the Father of his country went alone, and sought strength and guidance from the God of armies and of light." – Albert Barnes, D.D.

We face a Christmas this year that is a time as critical for the cause of freedom as that of the patriot cause in 1776. Although our adversaries may be more elusive, the same biblical strategy of victory rings through the ages if we will listen and learn from the small freezing remnant who camped on the shores of the Delaware over 230 years ago.

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By Christmas Eve of 1776, the American Revolution was, in essence, over. The Americans had lost. George Washington was out of options. His army, now down to only a few thousand, had lost seven battles in a row and was freezing on the west bank of the Delaware River awaiting the end. The British, on the other hand had 33,000 soldiers, well over a hundred ships and were partying in New York City and preparing for the final surrender. Most of the American troops had resolve, but they had lost hope that England could ever be

defeated. Half of Washington's army, 1,500 men, were quitting that week and going home because their enlistments were up.

Washington decided on one final offensive. He gathered the same fishermen who had helped him retreat in August from New York and had his beleaguered troops ferried across the half frozen Delaware at midnight on Christmas Day. Just before they boarded the boats, the General had The American Crisis, the challenge by Thomas Paine, read to the men.

"These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to set proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has right [not only to tax but] 'to bind us in all cases whatsoever' and if being bound in that manner is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon the earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God."

Washington landed near Trenton in a blinding snow and hailstorm that served as a cover for his crossing and approach. His men quickly surprised a

detachment of 1,200 Hessians. Colonel Rhal and his men had been partying and drinking with a pompous, false sense of security late into the night. When Washington attacked in early morning almost all were captured and Rhal was mortally wounded. That day, Washington re-crossed the river with over 1,000 prisoners, and only five casualties of his own. As was his custom, he did not mistreat his prisoners.

The Americans immediately crossed the river again avoiding the massive British counter attack and surprised the British from the rear at Princeton. General Washington won another victory, riding his horse between the lines of fire and miraculously remained unscathed as both armies volleyed. His troops rallied for a final charge and won.

These victories changed the course of history. Almost all of the American soldiers re-enlisted. France began to support the cause, and hope in the providence of God (the great equalizer) reinvigorated the colonists.

Listen to the words of George Washington as he challenged his soldiers in the depths of the despair of the 1776 campaign:

"The time is now near at hand which must probably determine, whether Americans are to be, freemen, or slaves; whether they are to have any property they can call their own; whether their houses, and farms, are to be pillaged and destroyed, and they consigned to a state of wretchedness from which no human efforts will probably deliver them. The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army. Our cruel and unrelenting Enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission; that is all we can expect. We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die."

May I encourage you to share the Christmas Miracle of 1776 with your family this Christmas, challenging

them to be committed warriors in Christ's army this coming year? Presents, parties and hot cider pale in comparison to the sacrifice of our Savior and the sacrifice of our patriot fathers who died in the forest of New Jersey for our liberty.

Years after the victory was secured and the Constitution was ratified Washington penned these words:

"No one can rejoice more than I do at every step taken by the People of this great Country to preserve the Union--establish good order & government--and to render the Nation happy at home & respected abroad. No country upon Earth ever had it more in its power to attain these blessings than United America. Wondrously strange then, & much to be regretted indeed would it be, were we to neglect the means, and to stray from the road to which the finger of Providence has so manifestly pointed. I cannot believe it will ever come to pass! The great Author of all good has not conducted us so far on the Road to happiness and glory to withdraw from us, in the hour of need, his beneficent support. By folly & misconduct (proceeding from a variety of causes) we may now & then get bewildered; but I hope, and trust, that their is good sense and virtue enough left to bring us back into the right way before we shall be entirely lost."

Today, as then, the whole world is observing the internal battle for America being waged between the Christian and secular forces. We dare not underestimate the power of our life testimony as we wage this life or death struggle for freedom. We may yet see millions of apathetic Christians come alive if they see us laying our lives down for future generations by God's power. America desperately needs a brave, virtuous, and loving army of believers who will permeate and heal our suffering nation.

- Dr. Marshall Foster