

Where Have All the Heroes Gone?

Do This In Remembrance... 911

by
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September 11, 2001 the whole world was shocked by the pictures of commercial airlines crashing into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. Soon after the initial impact, we were subjected to the gruesome sight of people jumping to their deaths from the top floors of the 110-story towers.

But there were also heroes in this tragic story. Of particular note were the valiant firemen, policemen, rescue workers and citizens who rushed to rescue the victims—many of them losing their own lives in the process of trying to save others. Blood donors from around the nation quickly responded as well. Even these heroic measures mirror the greatest act of love ever—Jesus Christ! Jesus said no greater love than this that a man lay down his life for His friends. Jesus, the greatest fireman, gave His own life to rescue perishing humanity from hell's flames. He, the greatest blood donor, gave his own blood so that we might live. Although the fates of many were sealed as the towers collapsed, rescue workers worked for days in the faint hope of finding some of their brethren alive beneath the chaos and rubble. These rescue workers became modern day heroes.

We've heard the valiant deeds of passengers on the planes that fateful day. Their courage set an example for us all. We've heard the reports from spouses and telephone operators who spoke with these courageous men and women prior to their deaths. Being able to dial out on a phone line from the sky was a comfort and reassurance for those passengers. When we think of 911, it has a different meaning now. Though a number we dial in time of emergency, somehow we felt helpless that day. Yet we weren't without hope. We can always call on God in time of crisis. Because of Christ's heroism we have that kind of immediate access to God – at all times. America and the world still need this kind of renewed heroism.

Heroes of Faith

Likewise, the church needs similar heroes today. Heroes of the faith who are willing to risk their own lives to rescue the perishing at all cost. Every generation needs heroes—men and women we can look up to and emulate. The Bible is filled with stories of heroic believers who obeyed God and did mighty exploits in difficult situations. We are told to

consider their faith and imitate their manner of life. The writer of Hebrews makes several references to those who should be imitated:

*We do not want you to become lazy, but to **imitate** those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised (Heb. 6:12).*

*Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and **imitate** their faith (Heb. 13:7).*

*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter (or finisher) of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. **Consider Him** who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Heb. 12:2-3).*

Not finding positive heroes to imitate, many of our young people today have sadly latched onto negative heroes. From perverse rock stars, gang leaders, television stars, athletes and the list goes on. Many destructive role models have substituted for the heroes our generation so desperately need. Just as the Bible points to heroes of the faith whose example we should follow, it also gives many warnings about imitating the ways of evildoers:

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor. 15:33)

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God (3 Jn. 1:11).

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked (ungodly) or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1-2).

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations (peoples) there (Deut. 18:9).

Lives Worth Imitating

A few years ago, NBA basketball star Charles Barkley stirred quite a controversy by insisting that he not be considered a role model. He argued that no one should imitate him just because he was a sports star. Charles Barkley’s effort to distance himself from sainthood is perhaps understandable. He has never claimed to be a model of spirituality, and he doesn’t want anyone to expect that of him. But, what he failed to see, however, is that those in the public eye have an inherent impact on their fans and society around them. We as Christians, or should I say those who claim to follow Christ, should be concerned when we try to make the same argument.

While it is true that we certainly aren’t perfect—and won’t be anytime soon—that is no excuse to shrug off our responsibilities to reflect the love and character of Christ. If our Christian life is so hypocritical and compromised that it isn’t worth imitating, we need to take serious review of our lives. Leonard Ravenhill used to say, “Are the things you’re living for, worth Christ dying for?”

The apostle Paul had no reluctance to challenge people to follow his example. Not in a self-righteous manner, but with a spirit of humility and with confidence he could say:

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example...(2 Thess. 3:7).

Even though you have ten thousand teachers (guardians) in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me (1 Cor. 4:15-16).

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, afflictions...(2 Tim. 3:10-11).

I don't think Paul challenged people to imitate him because he was some kind of super-Christian. But he knew that with a clear conscience, empowered by the grace of God and a posture of humility, he could confidently say that the life of Christ in him was worth imitating. God is not looking for clones of modern-day Christianity but imitators of Christ.

Dr. Edwin Louis Cole, founder of the Christian Men's Network, often said that "Champions are not those who never fail but those who never quit." We need a persevering spirit because we need winners and champions for Jesus. We need modern-day heroes of faith and courage.

The sad fact is, many of today's young people are not impressed by the examples set before them. We have not been heroic in our fight against spiritual darkness in our land, but rather have often been seduced by it. Try as we might to encourage others to be zealous disciples of Christ, it is hard for them to accept our message when it is undercut by our complacent and uninspiring lives.

Paul encouraged both Christians and unbelievers to follow his example. King Agrippa asked Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul's reply was great: "*Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am...(Acts 26:28-29).*"

If we are honest, we will have to admit that today's church has often been a laughingstock in the eyes of the world. We have provided fodder for comedians and talk-show hosts to ridicule the gospel. A healthy respect for the things of God is replaced with a yawn or a chuckle.

The story has been told of a Sunday school teacher who asked the children in her class, as they were on their way to the church service, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping!" It is time for us to awaken from our sleep and arise!

Someone once suggested that we should include the following songs to our hymnals:

- A Comfy Mattress Is Our God
- My Hope is Built on Nothing Much
- Be Thou My Hobby
- Pillow of Ages, Fluffed for Me
- I Surrender Some

- I'm Fairly Certain That My Redeemer Lives
- Sit Up, Sit Up for Jesus
- What an Acquaintance We Have in Jesus
- Take My Life and Let Me Be

Youth, Hope of the Future

A church (Christian) that is soft and apathetic will never succeed in reaching a lost and hurting world. People, young people in particular, will be reluctant to give their lives for something that is shallow and hypocritical. Even unbelievers and the unchurched are tired of the hype and pretense. They are looking for reality and for something to believe in. They won't be moved with anything less. They are the **hope of the future**, a prophetic generation just ready to come forth into their destinies.

We can see on the daily news just how volatile the world is around us. In contrast with this prevalent crisis, the Bible tells us clearly what it will take to again capture the imagination of young people today.

The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.

Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

*Your people shall be **volunteers in the day of Your power**;*

In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,

*You have the dew of your **youth** (Ps. 110:2-3, NKJV).*

The psalmist proclaims that people shall freely volunteer for action "*in the day of Your power.*" When the church again displays God's character and His power, it won't be hard at all to convince people about the claims of the gospel.

Prior to the last Presidential elections, I was asked to give an invocation at the Texas convention of one of the two major political parties. I started by saying, "There was a great political leader name Solomon who once said, 'hope deferred makes the heart sick' and also said that, 'a merry heart does good, even better than medicine'. There was also a great leader named Hezekiah who stated, '...this is a day of trouble and distress, because the children are ready to come forth, but there is no strength to deliver.'" I went on to explain that we have a whole generation of young people who are in the desert of life, looking for something to believe in. They need a vision of hope and strength to come forth into their purpose and destiny. They need godly role models to emulate. They need to be strengthened, encouraged and empowered. They are the hope of the future. **I went on to say that we needed a revival of character...from the pulpit to the White House.**

Heroes of Courage

Although it might not be easy for the coming generation to see inspiring examples of heroes, the pages of history are filled with great examples of men and women who laid down their lives for what they believed in. We see this throughout scripture, in books like Foxe's Book Of Martyrs and in numerous other stirring volumes cataloging remarkable accounts of unflinching devotion to Christ. I still am moved each time I think of men like Deitrich Bonnhoffer. Before being martyred in Nazi Germany he stated, "**When Christ calls a man to Himself, He bids him to die.**" In the year 2000 alone, an estimated 165,000 Christians around the world were martyred for their faith.

Joan of Arc

In the first part of the fourteenth century, a young French teenager named Joan of Arc, although an inexperienced warrior, inspired the entire French Army -- something no king had been able to do.

Joan went to the General of the army and confidently told him, "I'm going to lead the men over the wall!"

The General replied, "Honey, there isn't one man who is going to follow you over the wall."

"I wouldn't know, I don't plan on looking back to check" was her reply. Every man followed her. Her courageous heroism and example delivered her country. Those who say they are Believers need this kind of heroic example. When we sing lyrics like, "I have decided to follow Jesus...the Cross before me, the world behind me...no turning back, no turning back," may they mean more than words.

Later, at the age of 19 and about to be burned at the stake, Joan was given one last chance to deny her convictions. Her reply challenges each of us to follow our convictions:

"Every man gives his life for what he believes. Every woman gives her life for what she believes... Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, and yet they give their lives for that little or nothing. One life is all we have, and we live it and then it's gone. But to surrender what you are to a life without belief is more terrible than dying, even more terrible than dying young. But there is a worse fate than living without belief. It is to live without a firm commitment to that which at the end of life, at the portals of eternity, turns out to have betrayed you."

We need people today who exhibit this kind of radical commitment. The days of cosmetic Christianity are coming to an end. Laodecian Christians must decide whether they will be hot or cold, devoted or lukewarm.

We need a renewed **passion for God** that give us a **compassion for others**. Genuine passion for God allows no room for compromise or mediocrity. How can we settle into complacency while multitudes upon multitudes of lives are in the balance of eternity? How can we be so hardened of heart as to sit back on the beach of comfort and apathy while so many are still shipwrecked in the sea of destruction?

Leonard Ravenhill once asked, "Could a mariner remain idle if he heard a drowning cry? Could a doctor sit in comfort and just let his patients die? Could a fireman let people burn without lending a hand? Can you sit at ease in Zion (or as Christians) while the world around you is damned?" These are still powerful questions for us today.

Window of Opportunity

Let us not miss our windows of opportunity. Paul said in 1 Cor. 16:9 that a "*Great and effective door of opportunity has been opened unto me but the adversaries are many.*" We live in a great and exciting time in which we, the Church, must bring a message of hope. Distractions, disappointments, discouragements and even temptations can be works of the adversary to keep us from what God wants us to do to be effective at this time. Distractions can be our love of comfort and ease or the cares and securities of this

world. Yet even that is being shaken to do as everything that can be shaken is being shaken as spoken of in Heb. 12:25-29. From Wall Street, the economy to the Church, our securities are being shaken. We must let go of those natural securities and turn to the Lord. When those areas of distraction bring disappointment we become discouraged. We get disappointed in people and even in God. From a place of discouragement we must watch out that we don't compromise our convictions. In those times, our response should be different though. We should call upon the Lord and His emergency hotline to find peace, grace and mercy. God can turn it all around the economy, our circumstances, and worldwide situations. He promises us a future of good and not evil of a future and a hope. If we call upon Him, He will answer (Jer. 29:11-12).

God can do exceedingly beyond all we can think or imagine. He's given us a great and effective door to reach many with the Gospel. Whatever door He opens, no man can shut. May we not have to look back and say weeks and months from now that the harvest is past; the Summer has ended and the people are *still* not saved (Jer. 8:20). We have the opportunity to bring a message of hope. Luke 21:13 is an encouraging picture that in the midst of challenges and world wide crisis we can "*Let this be in occasion for our testimony.*"

True Intercession

Joel 2:17 provides a vivid picture of true intercession:

Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make Your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

The world is looking for answers. Why should they say, "Where is their God?" God is looking for modern day heroes of the faith that rise to the occasion, who like Moses and Aaron are willing to stand between the living and the dead to stop the plague of sin and destruction (Numbers 16:43-48).

This is not a comfortable place to be! Most of us would rather be spectators in the epic battles of our times. "Hurrah for Jesus!" we shout from the grandstands. Or maybe we're more concerned and upset about possible baseball strikes, than we are for a world in crisis. Instead of standing in the gap between the living and the dead, we sit in comfort on our padded pews. Instead of running into the flames to rescue lost souls, we piously hide out in our stained-glass coffins.

George MacLeod, a famous Scottish preacher once said:

"I simply argue that the cross should be raised in the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town's garbage heap; at a crossroads, so cosmopolitan they had to write his title in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. At the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. That is what He died for. And that is what He died about. And that is where church people ought to be, and what church people ought to be about."

Echoing this same passion for intercessory evangelism C.T. Studd wrote, "Some like to live within the sound of church or chapel bells; I'd rather run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

To quote my friend, Pastor Dale Bronner from Atlanta, "Our Passion for Christ must be greater than our Passion for anything else."

Is there hope that we can really make an impact? Yes, indeed! As Winkey Pratney once said, "When God finds someone with courage to pray, preach, and live a life before Him of holiness and compassion, He can literally change the face of a nation."

Courage and character in any man or woman shine most brightly in times of crisis and intense pressure. The sirens and alarms are screaming a resounding cry, "Spare Your People, O Lord." You and I can be a part of the largest, mobilized rescue effort in our day as we reach the multitudes living on the edge of eternity. The question is, "will we answer the call?"

911 – is a number we dial in America in time of emergency. Emergencies are typically times of crisis and desperation in which quick intervention is needed. We can see tragedy turn to triumph as we call on the Lord in time of crisis. He answers when we call with comfort, peace and promise for the future. While many remember 911 as a time of great tragedy, crisis and despair, may we the church bring a message of hope. It's time to call on the Lord. It's time see God bring triumph from tragedy, victory from crisis, and hope from despair. Let's look at what God can do when we call on His 911.

Cost of Freedom

This is depicted so wonderfully through the work of the Cross by the price Christ paid to rescue us. He answered our 911 call by giving His life for us. One way we commemorate His perpetual gift of life is through communion. "Do this in remembrance of Me" was the instruction our Lord gave us. He said each time we take communion we do it to remember. We remember His great act of love and the tragedy by which that love was bestowed on us. At the same time we are reminded of God's grace and hope for our future. As followers of Jesus Christ we reflect on the 911 tragedy with this in mind. There's something we can do. We can rise up and rescue the perishing, bringing a message of hope. We can be those true witnesses who rescue lives spoken of in Prov. 14:25. It's our time, our season, to demonstrate the love of Christ to our communities, our nation and the world. Let's give 911 a renewed meaning of hope. It's time to answer *His* call.

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