

*But the one who endures unto the end will be saved. MT 24:13*

The Marines have a slogan, "The change is forever," by which they mean that there are no ex-Marines and no former Marines. Once a Marine, always a Marine. Climbing the ladder of success in the Marine Corps is never a given. A Marine must earn his or her place every step of the way. Though I never served, our oldest daughter, Meagan, learned that the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor that every Marine proudly wears is never given, never rewarded, it is always earned at great personal sacrifice. Once the rite of passage has been secured, the Marine knows, in himself, that "The change is forever." Of that, the Marine is rightly proud.

Christians boast the same slogan. "The change is forever!" We understand that the cost of our salvation was nothing less than the bloody sacrifice of the Son of God on Calvary's cross. Jesus secured our salvation every step of the way. His was the whipping post, His the nails, the cross, and the spear. As they say, "No pain! No gain!" For Jesus, it was, "No cross! No crown!" Jesus literally had to go through Hell and back again, being forsaken by the heavenly Father, to overcome sin and death and hell before rising from the dead. In that battle Jesus Christ earned your salvation. Through faith in Him, you are victorious over Satan and Hell and Death. You've seen the jacket of highly decorated U.S. soldier haven't you! All those ribbons and medals. As a Christian you are highly decorated. Your medal is the cross. Pin it on! Wear it proudly. Your change is forever, by the grace of God, Christ has won for you a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of life, a change of love, a change from despair to hope, a change from grief to joy, eternal joy. The ceaseless sacrifice of the life of Christ has secured your place in Paradise forever.

**Endurance** is a virtue with a glorious history. By endurance, the highest mountains have been conquered, the greatest oceans have been crossed, and the greatest battles have been won to change the course of human history. Today American culture does not cultivate the virtue of endurance. Impatience is our way of life. Jesus says, "**But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.**" The Christian life is not a sprint to the finish line. When St. Paul says, "run the race" he is reminding us that Christians are long-distance runners and Christians exercise long-distance faith. We Christians are not called to do just one good work but rather to live our

lives in Christ in such a way that our days, months, and years are filled to overflowing with good works. Peter said, **“Do not tire of doing good.”**

So often we pray for an end to the struggles of life, an end to the constant temptations that daily rear their ugly head and often bring us down. We pray to the Lord to take away our troubles, our temptations, and set us free. But what we really have in mind is freedom for an easy life. Such is not the will of God. Discipleship in Christ is neither for the weak, nor the faint of heart but rather for the long-distance Christian. God's grace in Christ is sufficient for every trouble in life, every pressing temptation. In the midst of our trials; the Lord teaches us to focus on Him, on His cross, and His brutal mistreatment, so that we might learn endurance, endurance unto eternal life. If you are struggling in your Christian life to live a pure life, and to serve the Lord, this is the sure sign that you are following Him. Jesus stands beside you. He will lift you up, set you upon a rock and cause you to endure, as you look to Him.

Today, as we celebrate Independence Day we honor and recognize all who have served our nation at the cost of great sacrifice and also to all who are serving today that we might be free – free to pursue life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. (Ask veterans to stand up.) History shows us that no nation can long endure without the binding support and spirit of its own people. You believe in America, the free America for which soldiers have sacrificed and endured since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, not a nation that is remade in the image of the socialist states of Europe or of the failed states of communism; an America where the government's primary purpose is to protect and defend its citizens, not to impose burdensome taxes and laws that sap the strength of the individual and business. We believe in an America that has been blessed to be a blessing to others, and America has been.

We believe in the greatness of America, but not in the spirit of a false worship that says America can do no wrong, nor in the teaching of a false interpretation of Biblical prophecy that says America is the new Israel on earth, but rather in the true spirit that is America, the course for freedom set by our founding fathers that has made America a beacon of freedom for others ever since the War for Independence, so that until this day American soldiers will fight for the right of others to live and breathe free. Though it is wrongly attributed to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, it is still true when it is said, “Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you.

Jesus Christ and the American GI. Jesus Christ died for your soul. The American GI for your freedom.” Of this you can be proud.

Time would fail us to recount the stories of all the heroes of our national history. As some of you know at Christmas time I was able to visit the Yorktown Victory Center and Battle Ground. In the Victory Center museum is list of officers who were in the ranks of George Washington’s army when General Cornwallis surrendered. There in the list of officers is James Carnahan from the 4<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Regiment, one of our family’s first ancestors in the U.S. The lady at the desk then indicated to me that his presence was all the more remarkable because almost all of the Pennsylvania Regiment had mutinied and returned home. I have also discovered that his name appeared on the muster roll at Valley Forge. Evidently he served from beginning to the end of the war. Every since 1781, the history of America is full of stories of incredible endurance against overwhelming odds and all the blood spilled to secure our place as a nation. The sacrifice to this very day has been ceaseless. The grace of God rests upon this nation. The sacrifices of our American forefathers call for us to endure in our faith.

Do you love America? I know you do. Have you ever counted the cost that set her free? More than 600,000 Americans died in the Civil War when the national population at that time of 30 million. Proportionally, that would be over 17 million Americans if that Civil War were fought today. More than 550,000 Americans died in WWII from the beaches of Normandy and the rolling hills of Germany to the black sands of Iwo Jima, Guam, and Okinawa. In Vietnam, 56,000 Americans died and in Korea, another 53,000 died. In the war on terrorism', over 5500 Americans have paid with their life in Iraq and Afghanistan, and another 30,000 have been wounded in action against the enemy. Ceaseless sacrifice ... but you must keep an enduring faith, unto the end and you shall reap the reward.

Imagine a young man on the other side of the world whose mind has been loaded with hate for America. He has trained for months to execute his plot against the "infidels." He seeks opportunity to inflict the greatest damage. He puts on the suicide vest, ready to strike and destroy innocent lives instantly, willing to die for what he considers a just cause. They tell us that Islam is a religion of peace and that the Koran forbids such suicide and indiscriminate killing, yet it goes on, and on, and on . . .

But you, O Christian, you know the truth in Christ that has set you free! How much more willing ought we be to live, serve and yes, even die for our Lord Jesus Christ and His just cause? The most just of all causes upon this earth is to confess the name of Jesus, follow Him as our Lord, obey His will, and endure unto the end. My dear friends, the most patriotic thing you can do is to stand up, confess the name of Jesus, and then oppose the social engineering that would redefine marriage, promote abortion, legalize same sex marriage. Pray daily that God would be merciful to America for the sake of His Son.

Nobody ever said that endurance is easy. Without the grace of God it is impossible. We struggle in our Christian life, struggle for greater holiness, greater faith, purer behavior. What do we find? We are not always very good at endurance, are we. We give in to the enemy when he tempts us so that instead of hanging in there and fighting, we give in. Because of sin, our lives often look like the lives of war-weary refugees. But through Jesus Christ we know our Lord will accept us again if we return to Him in repentance and faith.

They straggled home after the war by the thousands and tens of thousands. They hobbled along the road with nothing more than the dirty shredded clothes upon their back. Headed home for comfort ... if they could find it. Headed home for security ... if they could make it. Headed home for shelter. .. if they could find a roof for their heads . Who are these stragglers? They could be the vanquished victims of any war ... or they could be the spiritually war weary.

The Germans, hobbling home after WWII, had a word for it when they returned to their bombed-out cities. "*Wir sind dachlos!*" they cried, ROOF-LESS, without a home, without shelter, without a covering.

Jesus leads us home. He gives you the grace to endure though ceaseless sacrifice unto the end. He says to your heart, "No longer are you roof-less. I will shelter you. I will comfort you. I will cover you ... with my righteousness. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! **"But he who stands firm to the end will be saved."**