

DIEHARDS WHO DID NOT DIE

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Heb. 11:33-34, 37-38; 12:1-2

I am sure we have all read with interest the recent stories which have filled our newspapers about the American soldiers who have been convicted of collaborating with the enemy in Korea.

In no case was there a definite charge of treason which could have been punished by death. But they were convicted of giving aid and comfort to the enemy. Of cooperating with the enemy to the harm of their own country.

On the other hand, we have read thrilling stories of their direct opposites. The diehards who refused, even at the penalty of death, to surrender those principles which they held most dear. To them, no price was too great to be paid. Loyalty to their convictions was more important than life itself.

I wonder if, this morning, we might not profit from a brief look at these alternatives. Is it possible that we, as Christians, may have been guilty of giving aid and comfort to the enemy? Or, on the other hand, what characteristics must we develop if we, too, would be diehards who will not die. Look at that first alternative.

Collaborating With The Enemy

There is something sickening about the sound of the phrase itself, isn't there? It speaks of weakness, deceit and lack of honor. But when we look at it in reference to the Christian life, we see a relationship that is startling and instructive.

From the very beginning, the Christian life has been pictured as that of a soldier's. The New Testament abounds with military phrases and figures. In his letter to Timothy, Paul writes:

“Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ“ (II Tim.2:3).

“Put on the whole armor of God“ (Ephs. 6:11).

“Fight the good fight“ (I Tim.6:12)

and similar phraseology is found again and again throughout the New Testament.

Even our hymns serve to remind us of our enlistment in the army of God.

“The fight is on, oh Christian soldier“

is one that comes to mind. And, of course, that great marching song of the Christian church, “Onward Christian Soldiers, marching as to war.”

You see, we are soldiers and thus it is fitting to ask,

“Are we collaborating with the enemies of Christ’s church?“

Most of us would vehemently deny the charge. We would angrily say it isn’t so. But remember, the charge is not one of open treason such as that of Judas who went over completely to the enemies of his master. It is “giving aid and comfort“. It is “collaborating“ in a way that is often unnoticed, even to those of us who do it.

Although I want to place the bulk of my preaching this morning on the positive side of those characteristics which make us worthy soldiers of the cross, let me take a moment or two to suggest a few ways in which we may be guilty of collaborating with the enemy.

One quite obvious way is by merely staying away from church. By this simple act of inactivity, we are saying to our neighbors, friends and family: the church is not really important at all. In a sense, we are casting our vote to close its doors. What is that but giving aid and comfort to the enemy?

Think about the deliberate collaboration which takes place nearly every Sunday when many a Christian spends his or her time batting a ball about a golf course instead of striving to be a better person by attending church. And what about those who spend their time in hoeing weeds rather than in holy worship?

Think of the tragic collaborating which takes place in many a Christian's back yard as they spend every Sunday morning caring for a plot of ground 60' by 125' as though that was all of God's world which matters to them, even though they belong to a church.

Of course, I've heard all of the arguments for such collaboration. “It's the only time I have for gardening“ and do forth. But it seems to me that it is better to have a couple of withered saplings than to have a withered soul. It is better that on Sunday we Christians smell strongly of alter incense than peat moss and fertilizer.

Another way in which we sometimes unconsciously give aid and comfort to the enemy is when we remain silent in the face of obvious injustices or when we thoughtlessly support ways in our national and community life which are not Christian, because to go along with the crowd is the easier thing to do.

And then, of course, one way that is particularly dangerous at this time of the year is the habit of slacking off in our dedication just because it is summer time.

Now, we do not ask or expect that you give up your vacation in order to remain faithful to your church. Everyone is entitled to a period of relaxation and recreation. But why not attend church wherever you are? You may have to drive a short distance to do it, but you will be happier in the long run. And nothing would please me more than to have you send me a copy of that church's bulletin. It is not only a testimony to your faithfulness, but a wonderful source of ideas which we might incorporate in our program here.

But for every one of us who will be away on any given Sunday, there are scores who are still at home. I can only hope that when you are at home this summer, you will determine not to “give aid and comfort to the enemy“ by ignoring the services that have been prepared for you and your family - but will find your place in church.

These are just a few of the ways in which we may be guilty of collaborating with the enemy. I am sure you can think of others. But let's move on from the negative side of things and take a look at those characteristics we must develop if we would be diehards in the truest and happiest sense of the word.

To me, a die hard is not a stubborn, old codger who refuses to face facts and does little more than argue over things. A die hard is one who will not compromise that essential principle in which he or she believes, but will stand up for it to the end. She may not always win. He may not always be right. But there is something noteworthy about people who know what they believe and why and therefore are not afraid or ashamed to stand fast for basic principles and cling tenaciously to them.

That is the first characteristic of a die hard. It is someone who is

Moved By Some Great Principle Or Ideal.

In 1920 Mr. Harold Begbie, in his book Gentleman With A Duster, wrote these lines about Winston Churchill.

“What Churchill needs is the direction in his life of a great idea. He must be saved from himself. He must be carried away by enthusiasm for some great ideal. An ideal so much greater than his own place in politics that he is willing to face death for its triumph.“

Think how marvelously those words were proved true by history. Mr. Churchill did become the servant of a great ideal, much bigger than himself, the survival of Great Britain and the freedom of the world.

Even so with us Christians. We must become slaves to a principle and ideal that is far grander than ourselves. We must be moved by the knowledge that only by losing our life will we find it again. We must face up to the fact that history was never changed by people with tendencies, feelings or leanings. That only those who built upon firm convictions have endured the storms of persecution,

slander and misunderstanding. So first of all, know where you stand and why, for only then will you find courage to prevail. And then, a die hard must --

Be Able To Distinguish Between Conviction And Stubbornness.

“Society has little honor for a stubborn person who insists on having his or her own way in unimportant matters. But it honors the one who will stand foursquare without compromise on some great principle of life in which he or she believes. To such people we owe the decisive decisions and changes which have made possible the long upward climb.”

Look at the long line of those who passed before us as proof that such diehards do not really die. There is Daniel who would not give up worshiping the one true God. So great was his conviction that even the threat of the Lion’s den did not sway him and long after the lion’s mouths were numbed by death, Daniel and his influence lived on.

Then there were the three Hebrew children who would not surrender their principles. They chose to face death in a fiery furnace rather than bow down before the graven image of a heathen king. And they were thrown into a fiery furnace. But they did not die. They lived triumphantly with One having the appearance of the son of God, who walked through the fire with them.

And what of Luther who staked everything upon the conclusions of his conscience? He would not compromise. It was not stubbornness that made him say, “Here I stand so help me God. I can do no other.” He had become the captive of a great conviction, an idea that was grander and more important than himself. “The just shall live by faith” became the starch that kept him straight and the sinew that made him strong. And he did not die. He lived to become the founder of a movement that brought life into a decadent church and proved to be the greatest advance in the history of Christianity. And then a die hard must --

Be Unafraid Of Loneliness And Persecution.

Heroes always walk alone. Trace the course of history and you will see that its' greatest movements have not been caused by the masses, but by the militant minorities.

Look at Russia. It is said there are only about four million dedicated communists in the entire state, and yet because of their tenacity, they control the minds of hundreds of millions of people.

In China, the number of dedicated communists is in the thousands and yet their influence in world affairs is not in sight. This is what the few have done for the forces of evil. But I say the world has not yet seen what God can do through a magnificent minority which is sold out to the cause of Christ.

However, if you would be part of that select society then put it down: you will often walk alone for the ranks of God's army have always been thin.

Elijah walked alone when he challenged the prophets of Baal to a test of fire. And yet, because of the faith of that one man, the course of Israel's history was changed for time and for eternity.

Abraham walked alone when leaving clan and clansmen he struck out into the wilderness because he would not compromise his vision of God. And yet, he did not die. He lived to found the first religion which said, “The Lord God Jehovah is one God.” And with that great affirmation of faith in one God, polytheism - the worship of many gods - was dealt a death blow from which it has never recovered.

The early disciples walked alone. They were few in number and when they set out to win the world they, of necessity, had to walk alone. Yet walk alone they did. Unashamed of the gospel of Christ, they faced mockery and slander, imprisonment and stoning, but they won. With their last weak gasp for breath, they gave voice to the great ideal that had propelled them. And when they could breathe no more, those martyrs did not die. Their influence lives on. As a result, today we see a church whose arms stretch forth to enfold the world.

If you would have the plaudits of the crowd, then do not attempt to wear the Christian warrior's

armor. For when the chips are down and the fair weather friends of the church have turned tail to run, it will be the diehards who march on alone. And then may I suggest that a die hard must

Be Unperturbed By Temporary Defeat.

When Moses left the princely palace of ancient Egypt to fight for the liberation of his people, he knew it would mean difficulty and hardship. Even so, he would not forsake the great ideal of a people who would be free. At times, it must have seemed as though God had forsaken them. But history has shown that it was only a temporary defeat. The forty years of wandering were not easy to endure. They were years of incredible suffering. But in the end, there was the promised land where they could fulfill their destiny as a nation blessed by God.

Time and time again, Lincoln went down to temporary defeat only to rise again. But at last, the mantle of greatness was placed upon him as he was called upon to bind up the gaping wounds of a country torn by strife and hatred. And when, at last, he went down to death, it was but death to his body. For his spirit lives on and the crown he wears shines brighter with the passing years.

You see, God does not always settle his accounts on the 26th of June. But settle them He will. And when that time of triumph comes, the die hard must

Be Prepared To Wear The Victor’s Crown With Humility And Grace.

That’s the final mark of greatness. The ability to win and not lose all in winning. The good sense to know that while you may have been the arrow that pierced the heart of some evil beast, it was the bow of a great conviction which propelled you to the mark, and thus to say

“The victory is the Lord’s. All glory to Him.”

Then it is that you will have joined the ranks of the “Diehards Who Will Not Die“.

Why have I chosen to give this teaching? First, because as we face the summer, I want you to feel your need for spiritual renewal is just as important as your need for physical recreation. Even though our activities are curtailed, our worship must continue undaunted by the warmth of the weather and

the lure of the road.

Second, as you go your several ways, I want you to be aware of the powerful influence which can come from just one life. Think back over the list I have set before you this morning and you will see that they were either individuals or small groups. But, because they were willing to be used by God, God used them to reverse the tide of history and today the world is a brighter place in which to live because they were diehards who did not die.

Remember that, when the sound of your single voice seems small against the clamor of the crowd. Let it ring out, for together with God, you will be a magnificent minority for the side of good.

Finally, I want you to know that you, yourself, are important. Our emphasis this year has, of necessity, been on the crowd. We have worked hard to show ourselves and our community what we could do if we really tried. But never once have I forgotten that a crowd is people, that the only real important measuring rod of success is what happens to individuals.

That's why I hope that during our first year as pastor and people, you have gotten a new hold on this great ideal of the Christian life and that, in a wonderful way, it has gotten a new hold on you. For when each of you is moved by the great idea that only in losing your life will you truly find it again, when each of you has learned to distinguish between conviction and stubbornness, when each of you has become unafraid of the loneliness that must always precede greatness, when each of you remains unperturbed by some temporary defeat, then, each of you shall wear the victor's crown.

For when wrong mounts the scaffold of your life, and truth sits on the throne, you will be a die hard who will never die. And like those who have gone before you, your influence will live on to provide a shaft of light for those who shall come after.