

The Centurion's Heart

This weekend we are celebrating the work of veterans in keeping our freedom secure. It is our special responsibility to make sure to honor them for that work. There is something that you cannot just manufacture in the heart of those who serve. It doesn't come just because you put a uniform on someone. Something special has to take place in their heart.

Social engineers work with strategies to bring about constructive change through innovative programs and institutions to achieve greater societal goals. As one social endeavor after another has demonstrated, no committee or individual is smart enough to create a program that will mesh with society at large without fulfilling the law of unintended consequences. This was true of the efforts to use the military in the Great Society efforts of the 60s to lift up the underprivileged. Simply expanding access to the military did not overcome ingrained social and cultural disparities. Rich Maczuga, as a paratrooper in Vietnam, has described how some people could just not fit in with the military culture. Of all the qualities that contribute to an effective military, there is one that is essential to determine whether one thrives or even survives in the military. It is the quality that the Roman centurion expressed that drew out the praise of Christ.

1. The call to selflessness -

Underlying the centurion's faith was a selflessness that is instilled by the disciplines of military life.

Matt 8:5-10 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that

thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*.

10When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

This account provides a stark contrast of faith. The Centurion, as a Roman, had far less cultural grounding to turn to the Jewish Messiah. As a Roman military leader, he was in a position that was automatically at odds with the Jewish sentiment against an occupying force. We read elsewhere in the Gospels of his sympathies with the Jews which would account for a simple faith not burdened with all kinds of cultural baggage that the Jewish leaders might have had.

The military quality that served him in this time of faith was the sense of selflessness. There might be many different personalities in the military, but to thrive or survive depends on an attitude of selflessness. Whether it is inspired by a cause or acquired by training, to have a cohesive military unit, you can't last if you live for self. This is evidenced by his singular statement: "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*."

He might have spoken about his benefit to the Jewish community and how he "deserved" a little payback. He might have tried to entice Christ by offering favorable treatment in exchange for a blessing. In a seemingly unrelated idea, the Centurion expressed his confidence in Christ as part of his military mindset. He demonstrated the selfless service that comes from living in a military culture. He understood it through the men under *him*, but he,

himself, was *also* was a man under authority. This attitude of living for interests that lie outside of self it also the attitude that accompanies becoming a Christian.

Phil 2:3-4 *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

4Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

2. Salvation and death to self -

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Rom 6:4-6 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection:

6Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Puritan minister John Flavel has said, "They that know God will be humble, and they that know themselves cannot be proud."

It is in the moment that the alcoholic can recognize that he is powerless and has no real control, that he needs God, and that he needs to consciously turn

over his life to God that he can begin the road of recovery. In an infinitely greater sense, it is when we realize we are powerless to earn heaven, that we need God and consciously humble ourselves and turn to God for His salvation that we step onto the road of eternal life.

When Christ gave Himself on the cross, He required nothing of us to earn that salvation. He did all the work. In the moment we ask Him to take our punishment for our sinfulness forever, He makes you a child of God.

3. True appreciation for the veterans -

Veterans are not known in general for "mostly peaceful protests" demanding they be paid back for all they went through. There are about 18 million veterans going about their lives. For every 10 people who walk past you each day, the odds are that one or two of them are veterans. They did their duty and went back to ordinary civilian life. At some time you might be inspired to tell a veteran "Thank you for your service." Veterans are human beings and therefore are not perfect. But their service should inspire in us to reflect the same selfless quality that led them to protect our way of life.

For a short while, Veterans Day was set to occur on a Monday so people could have a three-day weekend. It was thought that these extended weekends would encourage travel, recreational and cultural activities and stimulate greater industrial and commercial production. After four years, it was restored to November 11 which not only preserves the historical significance of the date, but helps focus attention on the important purpose of Veterans Day: a celebration to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.

We remember that the difference between Memorial Day and Veterans Day is that on Memorial Day we honor those who gave their lives for our freedom. On Veterans Day, we honor those who are alive. Jesus is the greatest

example of this. We are thankful for Him giving His life and we memorialize that in communion. We are thankful for Him as our Captain who is alive and leads us today in victory.

2Cor 9:15 Thanks *be* unto God for his unspeakable gift.

When it comes to our military, you can't say thank you to those who are departed, but we *can* thank those who are alive.

One way we can show our appreciation is to teach the next generation. It has become apparent that many of the next generation have been indoctrinated with a false standard. If a duck floats and wood floats then that does not mean a duck is made out of wood, even if it looks like a duck because it is hunter's decoy. It is the same kind of reasoning that is used to suggest that if someone is not happy in life and *truly* oppressed people are not happy that does not mean that all unhappy people are oppressed. We have been presented with so much imaginary oppression that when we are faced with genuine racism and bigotry in the anti-Semitism of today it defies rationality. We owe it to those who keep us free to pass the lessons of freedom along. Joshua had finished his work bringing the children of Israel into the Promised Land. They then faced the problem of passing on the lessons learned from the battles that had been fought.

Judg 2:8-13 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old.

9And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

10And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

They had failed, but why? They did not pass the lessons on successfully to the next generation. This is what is happening now in America with students calling for the genocide of the Jews.

Another way we can show our appreciation is by actually saying thank you.

Rom 13:1-7 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

3For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. **[This is the reason why we not only have capital punishment but also just wars,]**

5Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers,

attending continually upon this very thing.

7Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

It is the last verse that is significant. The word honor can be understood as an honorarium, an actual financial gift for someone's special service. How about a tangible thank you, like a cup of coffee, or a meal? This might be unrealistic to undertake on a grand scale personally, but what if we carried a few Dunkin Donuts gift cards in our pocket around Veterans Day and said thank you with a gift of a cup of coffee?

Probably the most important way we can show our appreciation is to ask what you would do differently if someone saved your life and gave you a second chance. Would you look back with regrets over what you should have done better? In a way, we are living day by day with a second chance because of the salvation we have in Christ supported by the brave men and women who have kept guard over this country. By contemplating the goodness we have been afforded we are able to live responsibly in the second chance without having to go through the first chance.

Luke 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

I get the sense when approaching veterans that they always have a humble attitude about their service. People appreciate appreciation, but they have a humility about how they were just answering the call of duty and that they did what they had to do. Nancy especially enjoys expressing appreciation to veterans. There has never been a time where any of them responded to her that

she now owes them something for what they have done. Yet, we do owe them. They kept our freedom secure enabling us to spread the Gospel and we owe them to live our Christianity to the best of the ability that God gives us.

As you consider your stand before God, your freedom has been protected to be able to consider your eternal destiny. Don't squander the opportunity to enter glory because you choose to live according to your convenience. If you don't have assurance that you will spend eternity in Heaven, then you need to be saved. When you ask Jesus to take your punishment for sin He will do that and make you a child of God forever.

Heb 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,
2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

If you are saved already, let the thought of all that goes into maintaining our freedom inspire us to set aside those things that easily beset us so we can run the race that is set before us.

1. The call to selflessness - Matt 8:5-10, Phil 2:3-4
2. Salvation and death to self - Gal 2:20, Rom 6:4-6, Gal 5:24
3. True appreciation for the veterans - 2Cor 9:15, Judg 2:8-13, Rom 13:1-7, Luke 12:48, Heb 12:1-2