**SUMMER SOLDIERS and SUNSHINE PATRIOTS**

George Washington believed Thomas Paine did as much, if not more, than any man to win the Revolutionary War. It is true what Edward Bulwer-Lytton said in his British play about Cardinal Richelieu - “The pen is mightier than the sword.” What Thomas Paine wrote in his eloquent pamphlets to the American colonists stirred them to fight, and defeat, Great Britain for their independence.

What was it that Paine wrote that so stirred him to use his pen to fight for freedom? He had heard of Patrick Henry’s famous speech in Virginia in 1775 in which he gave his immortal line – “Give me liberty or give me death!” Paine had been a failure in England and at the urging of Benjamin Franklin came to America in 1774. He immediately took up the cause of the Colonists and began to voice his opinion that liberty was worth fighting for. The tyranny of King George must be fought. Later that year he wrote his 50-page pamphlet he called *Common Sense*. It injected courage and determination into the hearts of the Colonists to fight on. It paved the way for the Continental Congress to draft and unanimously ratify the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

King George immediately sent a great army to put down this rebellion. By the winter of 1776 it looked like Gen. Washington’s rag-tag army was going to desert him. The bitter weather at Valley Forge drained the Continental Army of both men and spirit. If something wasn’t done fast then Washington would not be able to hold them together until spring. The cause looked lost. That is when Thomas Paine was commissioned to write another pamphlet he called *The American Crisis*. It was so moving that Gen. Washington had it read to his entire army at Valley Forge. Desertion ceased and spirits rose. Men, whose enlistment would end on December 31, 1776, re-enlisted on January 1 to continue the struggle. What was it that Paine said that so turned the tide? Read the very first lines of his pamphlet and you will better understand the power of the pen:

*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*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/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: It is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a 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 a 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 earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.*

When the temperatures were falling, and the snow drifts were rising, and the spirits of the soldiers were gone, the temptation to leave the ranks and return home to a loving family and warm fire were almost overwhelming. But that night around hundreds of campfires as those words were read, it changed the resolve of tens of thousands to fight on. We now enjoy our freedoms because of those brave warriors. Indeed, as 21st century Americans, we stand on the shoulders of giants of past centuries.

Just as in a physical crisis, so it is true in a spiritual crisis, to become a summer soldier and sunshine patriot is to shrink from the service of your Lord. Then, as now, these are the times that try men’s souls. It is during the hard times that separate the wheat from the chaff. And brethren, these are the hard times that will determine whether you are on the Lord’s side, or the Devil’s. Some will choose to be summer soldiers and sunshine patriots and join up when the going is easy. But when the winter of their faith hits, and hits hard, that will determine whether they resolve to “*wage the good warfare*” (I Tim. 1:18) and “*fight the good fight of faith*” (I Tim. 6:12), or do as so some first century Christians did, “*turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which you desire again to be in bondage*” (Gal. 4:9).

Our first century brethren went through a time which tried their souls. The author of Hebrews (10:32-39) expressed it even more eloquently then Thomas Paine’s crisis:

*32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: 33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; 34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. 35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:  
37 “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.  
38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”  
39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

I firmly believe those powerful words, what I would describe as ‘a call to arms,’ has saved the souls of thousands, if not millions, over the past 2,000 years. I know this, it has put steel in my bones and fire in my belly more times then I can remember. To rephrase Paine, “Hell, like tyranny, 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!” My freedom in Christ, and my eternal soul, and that of others, is worth fighting for. Brothers and sisters, “*we are NOT of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul*.”

If your spirit is flagging and your resolve is weakening during this time which tries your soul, read Hebrews. Then read it again. And again. Read it to the end when you see his benediction and words of exhortation in 13:20-21,

*“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*

Until tomorrow… “*do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.”*

I love you.

Rick