**TAKE THAT HILL**

I love Civil War history. I have walked numerous battlefields all through Virginia, Tennessee, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky and Alabama. But there is one special battlefield I have been to and thought about more than any other, Gettysburg Pennsylvania. On July 1-3, 1863 the greatest battle in American history took place that would decide the fate of this young nation that was “*fourscore and seven years*” old.

The Confederate army of General Robert E. Lee was advancing on this town of 2,400 people called Gettysburg. The Union army of General George Meade was advancing from the opposite direction. Over the next three days the historic battle resulted in nearly 51,000 casualties, including about 7,000 killed, 33,000 wounded, and 11,000 missing or unaccounted for. It’s hard to imagine the blood spilled on those few acres.

One event that became a major point of controversy was whether or not General Lee had sent an order to General Richard Ewell that read, “Take that hill, if practicable.” It had a caveat which said, “without bringing on a general engagement” due to the fact that all of Lee’s army had not arrived for reinforcements. Ewell hesitated, felt it was not “practicable,” and failed to take Cemetery Hill that first day. It ultimately led to Lee’s defeat, for on the third day Pickett’s Charge up that same hill led to disaster. The North won the battle and the tide of the war turned that day, leading to the South’s defeat.

Why am I talking about “Take that hill?” Because I want to talk about another hill that turned the tide of war and led to the greatest victory, not just in American, but in World history. I’m talking about Calvary’s Hill. But before I get there I want to tell you the background that leads up to it so that you will appreciate it all the more.

An old man, perhaps 110 to 115 years old, along with a young boy, perhaps 10 to 15 years old, were three days journey from the Hill of our story. God had spoken to Abraham in a dream and told him, “*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*.” He rises early in the morning and begins the walk of faith. “*On the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off*.” Abraham knows he must now “Take that hill” by killing his son of promise. He binds him to an altar and raises the knife. An angel of God stays his hand and proclaims, “*Now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me*.” That hill was Mt. Zion.

A thousand years later on that same Hill a king stood to bargain for a small piece of ground owned by Ornan the Jebusite. The king had sinned by numbering his army, being lifted with pride. God sent a plague upon the nation of Israel that killed 70,000 men, women and children. To stop the plague David went to Ornan and purchased a place to build an altar to sacrifice to God. God accepted the sacrifice, sending fire down as evidence of His approval (I Chronicles 21). It was on the site of that altar that David promised to build a Temple to God. That Hill was Mt. Zion in the City of David (Jerusalem).

Move forward another one thousand years. Just outside the walls of Jerusalem, within a stone’s throw of the Temple, stood a lonely hill called Golgotha (“the Place of the Skull”). It was the sacred Feast of the Passover, when a lamb was to be killed for the sins of the people. But instead of a one-year old lamb without spot or blemish being sacrificed, another perfect Lamb took its place. On that Hill another Father took His Son to be sacrificed. But this time there was no stay of execution. The Son became “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). This sacrifice, like the sacrifice of David on this same Hill, stopped another plague far worse than the killing of 70,000. This sacrifice stopped the plague of sin that was destined to kill billions upon billions for the next 2000 years.

Just as God had told Abraham, and David, to “*Take that Hill*!” – so Jesus Christ, though pleading to His Father to let this cup pass from Him, relented to go Calvary’s Hill by saying, “*Not My will, but Thy will be done*!” In a geographical sense that Hill, like Cemetery Hill, is an insignificant piece of rock and dirt. But as we look in hindsight back to those two Hills we grasp the historical meaning they have to us.

As Americans we see Cemetery Hill as the turning point of freedom that has become The United States, not The Divided States of America. As Christians we see Calvary’s Hill as the turning point of freedom where Abraham’s saving faith has become our faith as “*sons of Abraham*” (Gal. 3:29). It is where a pride-filled sinful David was shown to be a penitent “*man after God’s own heart*.” It is where the Son of God won the most decisive battle in history, defeating Satan and Sin and Death (Heb. 2:14-15).

“Take that Hill, if practicable!” General Ewell did not see it practicable, and failed to take it. Abraham, David, and Jesus saw it not only practicable, but essential. They conquered their fear and went forward into battle, gaining victories that will forever live in man’s memory, both now and into eternity.

This makes me want to sing with you this old 1913 classic hymn by George Bennard we know as *The Old Rugged Cross*. Will you sing it with me?

On a ***hill*** far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best, For a world of lost sinners was slain.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, Has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above, To bear it to dark Calvary.

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see,
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, To pardon and sanctify me.

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away, Where His glory forever I'll share.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it some day for a crown.

Until next time … *Take that Hill*! I’m right beside you, and love you. Rick