**FAITH OF OUR FATHERS**

***Heroes Work Here***

Tacitus was a Roman historian of world fame who lived from 56 AD to 120 AD. He wrote much about the history of Rome and its empire, as well as many of its emperors. In his book, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, written in 116 AD, he describes how Rome looked upon Christianity. He writes that on July 19th, 64 AD a fire raged and burned for nine days in Rome, destroying almost 75% of the city, including most of its great public buildings. Rumors began to spread that Nero started the fire in order to rebuild the city after his image and greatness. To deflect such rumors Nero blamed the disaster on the hated Christians. They were arrested and subjected to the worst kinds of cruelty.

The following are quotes from Tacitus that are very enlightening to us because of the references to our forefathers of faith who suffered before us, leaving us an example. Read them and weep.

*Annals of Imperial Rome 44.2*

“Yet no human effort, no princely largess nor offerings to the gods could make that infamous rumor disappear that Nero had somehow ordered the fire. Therefore, in order to abolish that rumor, Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called Christians, who were infamous for their abominations.”

*Annals of Imperial Rome 44.3*

“The originator of the name, CHRIST, was executed as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius; and though repressed, this destructive superstition erupted again, not only through Judea, which was the origin of this evil, but also through the city of Rome, to which all that is horrible and shameful floods together and is celebrated.”

*Annals of Imperial Rome 44.4*

“Therefore, first those were seized who admitted their faith, and then, using the information they provided, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much for the crime of burning the city, but for hatred of the human race. And perishing they were additionally made into sports: they were killed by dogs by having the hides of beasts attached to them, or they were nailed to crosses or set aflame, and when the daylight passed away, they were used as nighttime lamps.

*Annals of Imperial Rome 44.5*

“Nero gave his own gardens for this spectacle and performed a Circus game, in the habit of a charioteer mixing with the plebs or driving about the racecourse. Even though they were clearly guilty and merited being made the most recent example of the consequences of crime, people began to pity these sufferers, because they were consumed not for the public good, but on account of the fierceness of one man.”

To read of our spiritual heritage in that light brings tears to my eyes. We celebrate heroes in our world for the most mundane things like sports and entertainment, creating Halls of Fame for such trivial purposes. Being an athlete or an actor and gaining fame and fortune is hardly worthy of the name “hero.”

During this Covid pandemic we continually see signs that say, “Heroes Work Here.” These are seen at hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living residences, police stations, fire houses, military forts, and other places both public and private. Hear me out, I would never demean such people who put their health and lives at risk to serve others. I hold them up with great respect and salute them for their service.

But there is one group of people that in God’s eyes are the true heroes of this world. Hebrews 11 describes them in these words, the true Hall of Fame that is worthy of such courage and bravery. It is these people that are true heroes:

*35 Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. 36 Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.*

You can keep the applause and fame of winning the Grammy Awards for music. You can keep the All-Star and MVP Awards for Baseball, Football, Basketball, Hockey, Soccer, Tennis and Golf. You can keep the star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and the Oscar, Emmy, and Tony Awards for acting. You can keep the Pulitzer Prize and Poet Laureate for writing. You can keep the Nobel Prize for science, medicine, peace, literature and economics. You can keep the titles of President, Prime Minister or Chairman of nations. You can even keep the granite portrait on Mount Rushmore that lasts for centuries.

While the world applauds these people for their extraordinary talents and hard work, they all fade into oblivion when “*the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up*” (2 Pet. 3:10). But not so with God’s heroes. His “Hall of Fame” awaits their reward in the next world. Hebrews 11:39 – 12:2 describes them:

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

While Tacitus wrote in derision of Christians in Nero’s reign, God wrote of those same souls in a far different light.

So, who would you rather write your epitaph? What award (reward) do you covet?

Would you now join me in singing *Faith of Our Fathers*? - Rick