**OUR INVICTUS**

***or CHRIST’S CONVICT-US***

A famous poem was written by English poet William Earnest Hemley (1849-1903) in 1875 when he was 25 years old. Since childhood he had been ravaged by Tuberculosis. It became so bad that at 16 years old he had to have one of his legs amputated in order to save his life. Then, when he was 25, he was told he must have the other one amputated. He steadfastly refused and searched and found a surgeon who could help him save his leg with a series of painful surgeries. While recovering in an infirmary, laid up in bed, he sat and wrote the following poem to himself:

***Invictus***

Out of the night that covers me, Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be, For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeoning’s of chance, My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears, Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years, Finds - and shall find me - unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.

The poem has helped define the British people as great stoics, with the old “stiff upper lip” of courage in the face of adversity. The last two lines have been quoted by millions over the past century and a half:

“***I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul***.”

It was often quoted by Nelson Mandela when he was in prison for 27 years in the persecution of blacks during the apartheid era of South Africa. *Invictus* became the title of the 2009 movie starring Morgan Freeman (as Nelson Mandela) and Matt Damon. The words are plastered in gyms and quoted by coaches all over the world to inspire their teams. Doctors and hospitals use this poem to motivate patients to overcome their facing the fears of disease and death.

The meaning of the Latin word Invictus is “invincible, unconquerable, undefeated.” On the surface it seems to be inspiring and uplifting. It speaks of fortitude and courage in the face of great crisis. It has inspired many to never give up. But know this, Hemley was an avowed atheist who lived in the Enlightenment years of men like Charles Darwin (“there is no God”) and Frederic Nietzsche (“God is dead”). He believed that lie, so resolved to be his own “master” and “captain.”

Therefore, as I look at it from a spiritual viewpoint, I suddenly realize that it actually flies in the face of reality. It is not a Biblical truth. While we might fight our way through a sickness, or a marriage crisis, or financial ruin, ultimately the conclusion leads us to think we are in charge of our fate. To my mind it is nothing more than an adult’s child-like temper tantrum when they boldly claim, “No one’s the boss of me!” It’s a delusional claim to self-rule.

But…

I am NOT the master of my fate. I am NOT the captain of my soul.

The truth is I am helpless and weak. Jeremiah reminds us, “*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (Jer. 10:23). Solomon said, “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is the way of death*” (Prov 14:12).

Without the life, and death, of Jesus Christ, I have but one fate… hell. The response to Hemley’s *Invictus* can be stated from two authors. One is Dorothy Day (1897-1980), the other is the apostle Paul. Miss Day had taken Hemley’s poem and lived the prodigal life until she was 30. She finally realized, as did Solomon, that without God “*all is vanity and vexation of spirit*.” Now living for God she resolved to write this poem in response:

*Out of the light that dazzles me, Bright as the sun from pole to pole,  
I thank the God I know to be, For Christ – the Conqueror of my soul.*

*Since His, the sway of circumstance, I would not wince nor cry aloud.  
Under the rule which men call chance, My head, with joy, is humbly bowed.*

*Beyond this place of sin and tears, That Life with Him - and His - the Aid,  
That, spite the menace of the years, Keeps, and will keep me - unafraid.*

*I have no fear though straight the gate: He cleared from punishment the scroll.  
Christ is the Master of my fate! Christ is the Captain of my soul!*

Now that’s more like it! But better still is Paul’s greatest poetic response in Romans 8:31-39. It answers all who think they can live as an island away from God and conquer tribulation, distress, persecution, famine or sword. Paul’s response to such bravado:

*31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

*32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not   
 with Him also freely give us all things?*

*33 Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.*

*34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is   
 even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*

*35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or   
 persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

*36 As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long;  
 We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

*37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

*38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor   
 powers, nor things present nor things to come,*

*39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from   
 the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The Christian’s firm resolve in the face of despair is not to “pull myself up by my own bootstraps,” but to walk by faith and trust the One who holds me in His powerful hand.

Hemley’s *Invictus* is one option for life, but Christ’s *Convictus* hands Him the reins to become the Master of my fate and the Captain of my soul.

– Rick