



"God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another."
—William Shakespeare

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A City on a Hill (Part One)

Three hundred and eighty-nine years ago, John Winthrop sold his properties and joined with other pilgrims leaving England in search of religious freedom. Winthrop and his fellow Puritans felt that they had been chosen by [God](#) to establish an exemplary Christian community in the New World.

Sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, the future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony reflected on [Matthew 5:14-16](#) in a ship-board sermon he preached, exhorting his shipmates, "We must consider that we shall be as a city on a hill. The eyes of all people will be upon us."

Recall the ending of [Isaiah 43:12](#), "'Therefore you are My witnesses,' says the LORD, 'that I am God.'" The eyes of [the world](#) are on those of us who seek to be His servants. We are His witnesses. In this vein, we will consider three stories of people whose inspiring examples serve as a witness to the character of God.

[Jesus](#) teaches in [Matthew 5:44](#), "But I say to you, [love](#) your enemies, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you, and persecute you." His words fit well with the actions of our first example. The Amish and Mennonites in Shipshewana, Indiana, have a museum dedicated

to people whom they consider to be their fathers and mothers in the [faith](#). A featured individual is a Dutch Christian by the name of Dirk Willems.

Willems' rejection of the doctrine of infant [baptism](#), his devotion to his new faith, and his teaching and baptism of other adults in his home led to his condemnation by the Roman Catholic Church. He was subsequently arrested and incarcerated in a residential palace turned prison.

At one point, Willems escaped from the prison using a rope made of knotted rags. He slid down the wall and dropped on to an ice-covered moat. Spotting him, a guard took up the chase. The ice over the moat was thin, but due to the weight that he had lost while in captivity, Willems crossed the frozen water unharmed. The bulkier guard, however, broke through the ice and began sinking in the slushy *Hondegat* ("dog hole"), as it was called, which was as deep as thirty feet.

As the guard cried out in fear, Willems surely recalled Jesus' admonition in [Matthew 5:44](#), as he turned back and saved the drowning man. After a superior officer threatened him with imprisonment, the guard ignored Willems' selfless act, and instead of showing due gratitude and mercy, he recaptured Willems, who was consequently imprisoned, tortured, and burned at the stake. His story brings another of Jesus' sayings to mind, "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" ([Matthew 10:39](#)).

Our second example is the story of a man whose actions of holding to his convictions put us all to shame in this regard. [Lamentations 3:30](#) is pertinent to his story: "Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach [accept their awful insults (*The Living Bible*)]."

The movie, *Hacksaw Ridge*, which contains spectacularly intense battle scenes, tells the true story of Desmond Doss, a Seventh-Day Adventist and conscientious objector who chose to serve alongside his fellow countrymen during World War II. Although he had a job in the defense industry and could have received a deferment, Doss enlisted in the Army Medical Corps as a non-combatant, a medic.

His commitment to nonviolence was rock solid. Doss declined even to handle, much less fire, a weapon. The Army's website notes:

Because of his conscientious objector status—including his refusal to handle duties on the Saturday Sabbath—boot camp wasn't easy for him. He was threatened and harassed. Many of the other recruits threw shoes at him while he prayed, and they tried to have him transferred out of their unit.

In late April 1945, 26-year-old Doss and his battalion were called upon to help fight near Urasoe Mura, Okinawa, in a campaign that would be one of the last and biggest in the Pacific.

Using cargo nets, Doss' battalion was tasked with climbing a treacherous, 400-foot-high jagged cliff, nicknamed Hacksaw Ridge, to get to a plateau. Waiting for them were thousands of heavily armed Japanese soldiers entrenched in hidden caves and holes.

About a week into the fight, Doss went with the rest of his company as they attempted to gain control of the ridge. As they attacked, they received massive artillery fire from the entrenched Japanese. The assault left many casualties, so the remaining soldiers fled down the cargo nets to safety—all except for Doss, who stayed to treat the wounded left behind. After doing so, he dragged and lowered each of them down the side of the ridge to safety. Following each success, he would pray, "Dear God, let me get just one more man." His prayers were answered, and by nightfall, he had rescued 75 soldiers.

However, he was not finished. Days later, as the Americans slowly advanced, he received a severe leg wound from a grenade, but rather than endanger others, he treated the wound himself, waiting five hours for rescue. As he was being carried to an aid station, his unit came under attack again, and Doss gave up his spot on the stretcher to a gravely injured soldier. On his own, he hobbled toward an aid station, but he was hit by a sniper's bullet, shattering his arm. Using a rifle stock as a splint, he continued his trek, eventually reaching the aid station for treatment.

The Army's article concludes:

In October 1945, Doss was brought back to the states and had the bullet removed from his shattered arm. After the surgery, he was taken straight to Washington, D.C., where President Harry Truman placed the Medal of Honor around his neck. During his military career, Doss also received the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star, all without harming another human being.

Desmond Doss was a man of intense convictions, and he did not waver even once in aligning his actions with them. In Part Two, we will look more deeply at a final example and consider our witness for God in this world.

- John Reiss

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Clear Light Of A God-Given Life](#)

by Mark Schindler

Claire Wineland was an inspirational speaker who suffered from cystic fibrosis from birth, dying from a stroke on September 11, 2018 following a lung transplant. From her valiant example, we learn that: (1.) God the Father has given us life, He and His Son living their lives in us. God expects us to live now, in the moment, not waiting for a better day. (2.) Even though a time will come when our physical condition deteriorates, we should remember that God will never forsake us if we stay grafted into the Vine, Jesus Christ. (3.) We need to be ready to take the baton and courageously carry on the work when our time of service begins. Let us use whatever gifts God has given us in the moment, regardless of the cost.

From the Archives: Featured Article

'You Are My Witnesses...'

by Martin G. Collins

What is a witness? Martin Collins shows how the term was used in both Old and New Testaments. He also briefly covers the Two Witnesses and the everyday witness of a Christian.

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