

81.1 Forging Our Way

On December 17, 1777, the Continental troops arrived at Valley Forge. In a General Order, Washington informed his troops of the recent decision in Congress to have a day of thanksgiving on December 18.

Washington ordered the troops:

The General directs that the army remain in its present quarters, and that the Chaplains perform divine service with their several Corps and brigades; and earnestly exhorts, all officers and soldiers, whose absence is not indispensably necessary, to attend with reverence the solemnities of the day.¹

While the troops entered Valley Forge with thanksgiving, they would find very little for which to be thankful in the weeks ahead. Valley Forge was one of the most challenging encampments for the Continental Army and maybe for any US Army. Men died at a rate of twelve per day, and many troops did not have blankets or shoes. In the freezing winter of 1777, General George Washington was burdened with the lack of supplies for his troops camped at Valley Forge, and the overwhelming superiority of the British forces. He wrote repeatedly for supplies.²

While Valley Forge proved to be a formidable challenge, George Washington proved his leadership ability with his men. Not only was the General a capable leader but he was also an example of a Christian in the process. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (September 6, 1711-October 7, 1787) was one of the founders of the Lutheran Church in America. He was the father of John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg, the Lutheran clergyman who became a major general in the Continental Army and U.S. Senator. He was also father of Frederick Augustus Conrad Muhlenberg, a clergyman who was a member of the Continental Congress and eventually the first Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg pastored the Lutheran Church near Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War. He commented regarding George Washington as an eyewitness to his character:

I heard a fine example today, namely that His Excellency General Washington rode around among his army yesterday and admonished each and every one to fear God, to put away wickedness that has set in and become so general, and to practice Christian virtues. From all appearances General Washington does not belong to the so-called world of society, for he respects God's Word, believes in the atonement through Christ, and bears himself in humility and gentleness. Therefore, the Lord God has also singularly, yea, marvelously preserved him from harm in the midst of countless perils, ambushes, fatigues, etc., and has hitherto graciously held him in his hand as a chosen vessel.³

Almost everything we do as Christians will come with a price or a challenge. An event may start with a great promise, but along the way, the challenge comes, and we have to decide whether to give up or remain faithful to the task.

James reminds us to be joyful in these times because we gain through the process. He writes in **James 1:2-4** (NKJV):

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

I wonder if the Continental Army could identify with the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 4:8-9** (NKJV):

⁸ We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—

¹ Federer, William J. *American Quotations*. Amerisearch, 2013, p. 560.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 398.

God's counsel remains the same as what He told Joshua when He announced the death of Moses and that Joshua would be his successor. **Deuteronomy 31:6** (NKJV):

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

We know that by our forefathers' perseverance and God's grace, America gained independence from Great Britain. As a result, America became the light to the world of which the Puritans spoke. People came to America for freedom and opportunity, and freedom went from America to enslaved people. The blessings of liberty were ours and the world due to patriot endurance and faithfulness.

When we think about the coming of Christ, it appeared to be a simple thing, a baby born to a virgin in Bethlehem. What could go wrong with that? Mary and Joseph received divine instruction about the birth of Jesus. Hardships began when they arrived in Bethlehem, and there was no place for Mary to deliver the baby except in a stable or, more likely, a sheep cave.

When the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, they said some provocative things. The titles they used were the titles and descriptions given to Caesar. Thus, using these terms, they set up a perceived defiance of civil authority. Listen to their words in **Luke 2:8-14** (NKJV):

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

**¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”**

Jesus came as the world's savior to challenge the evil forces that enslave people. His name means Savior in Hebrew. Satan would not give up his territory without a fight and took the opportunity to kill Jesus on the cross. Satan and his minions thought they had stopped God but did not anticipate the resurrection. Paul observes in **1 Corinthians 2:7-8** (NKJV):

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Everything worth having is worth the effort and sacrifice. Our American Forefathers thought it was essential to sacrifice their time, resources, and lives for freedom and independence. They endured hardship and loss but ultimately won. We are the recipients of the blessings of liberty as their posterity.

Jesus thought you were worth the trouble and hardship He endured. He endured many obstacles and threats throughout His life, finally going through a horrific ordeal of the cross. Jesus endured pain, suffering, shame, separation from His Father, and death. He was triumphant over death and has removed Satan's greatest weapon against us.

We have our challenges today. The cause is worth the price. Let us continue and bring God's kingdom and will to earth like heaven.

Let's Keep The Light of *Patient Endurance* Burning!