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THE MEDAL OF HONOR

The Crown Of Life

By Rick Lanning

Hacksaw Ridge was a 2016 movie directed by Mel Gibson. The plot of the movie centered around the true story of a young Army private named Desmond Doss who was an avowed believer in Christ who grew up in the Seventh Day Adventist church. When he was a small boy he would stare for hours at a painting on the wall that listed the Ten Commandments. Each commandment had a picture over it. The one that fascinated young Desmond the most was the one of Cain killing his brother Abel, with the inscription "*Thou shalt not kill.*" He grew up firmly believing that men should never take the life of another man, or even hold a weapon.

When World War 2 broke out he was working in the Naval Shipyard in Virginia helping to build ships for the war. This job allowed him to seek a deferment from the draft. However, he felt a strong conviction to serve his country, so he enlisted, with the hope that he could serve as a medic, a non-combatant duty. In boot camp he learned different. His commanding officers and all his fellow recruits turned on him savagely, often throwing boots at him, reviling him, calling him a coward, even punching him, all in hopes of persuading him to hold and shoot a rifle. He never budged. While there were 70,000 draftees who registered as CO's (Conscientious Objector), private Doss shunned that label, telling others he was a CC (Conscientious Cooperator). He wanted to serve and help save lives.

When his company was sent off to war in the Pacific in July 1944 he found himself the butt of jokes and brutal treatment by all his shipmates. The first stop for his battalion was the island of Guam. A deadly battle was being waged and soon the army found itself with thousands of battlefield casualties. Private Doss proved his character in that chaos of dead and dying men, running from man to man while under intense enemy fire to save the lives of many soldiers. For his heroism he was awarded the Bronze Star with a V (for Valor). Then the army shipped to the Philippine islands and engaged in the Battle of Leyte. Again, Doss showed his bravery by saving many lives in the heat of battle, being awarded his second Bronze Star V. The ridicule and hatred stopped. He was now respected and even loved by his fellow soldiers.

But then they moved to the island of Okinawa. It was here private Doss became famous. A cliff that was 400 feet high had to be climbed, and the enemy, fully entrenched, would have to be destroyed. The cliff was called the Maeda Escarpment, but the army named it Hacksaw Ridge. Doss's B Company was given the task of taking that Ridge. On May 2, 1945 they climbed the ropes and engaged the enemy in mortal combat. Doss, unarmed, carried his medic bag from one wounded man to another while under fire. The army was so devastated they were ordered off the hill to safety. Desmond was the only soldier who refused to return, opting to stay on that Ridge all night to save as many injured men as possible. For 12 solid hours, under grenade and rifle attacks, he carried one man after another to the cliff's edge, tied a rope around him, and lowered him to safety. He kept praying "God, give me just one more life to save." That night, almost beyond human endurance, he rescued 75 injured men who would have been savagely murdered.

In another battle several days later he was wounded with shrapnel, then permanently injured by a rifle bullet in his arm while carrying a man to safety. For his service "above and beyond the call of duty" he became the only soldier in American history to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor as a conscientious objector.

The Medal of Honor.

It is the highest award given to those who serve our nation in war. The Medal says it is only given to those who "*distinguishes himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States.*" Out of the millions of military service men and women in our history there has only been 3,527 recipients of the MoH.

The story of Desmond Doss is truly inspiring. It is so rare to find a person with such integrity and faith that he would not bend and break to the intense pressure of the world. His determination to save life, not take it, cost him personal comfort and acceptance, but resulted in the rescue of hundreds of men and the gratitude of a nation. We applaud such "gallantry... at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty."

The Crown of Life.

As a boy growing up in the 1960's I was glued to the war shows on TV (*Combat, The Rat Patrol, 12 O'Clock High*). I thought it would be so cool to be a soldier and fight in war and become a hero. Most boys I knew felt the same. To be awarded the Bronze Star or the Medal of Honor would have been my Disney dream-come-true. But becoming a Christian causes our minds to "*seek those things above*" and to "*set your mind on things above, not on the earth.*" Why this change of focus? Paul answers: "*when Christ, who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory*" (Col. 3:1-4).

Instead of a White House ceremony where the President places the Medal of Honor around my neck and shakes my hand, I, along with every faithful disciple, will be honored at the Throne of God with all the angelic host watching in awe as Christ places "*an imperishable crown*" (1 Cor. 9:25), "*the crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim. 4:8), "*the crown of glory*" (1 Pet. 5:4) upon our heads.

But wait, there's more. It is also called "The Crown of Life." Read the inscription on this heavenly Medal of Honor: "*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive **the crown of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him* (Jam. 1:12). "*Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer... Be faithful until death, and I will give you **the crown of life***" (Rev. 2:10).

Just as the Medal of Honor is awarded to those who risk their life and go above and beyond the call of duty, the Crown of Life is awarded to those who endure temptation and face death with faith in God. But unlike the MoH, given only to a few, the CoL is given to "***all those that love His appearing***" (2 Tim. 4:8). I pray that includes you.

As a youngster I envied Desmond Doss. As an old man I now envy the faithful pauper Lazarus (Lk. 16:22), and the faithful martyr Antipas (Rev. 2:13). Side by side we will all be awarded God's medal of honor, "The Crown of Life."

First, the cross. Then, the crown.