

HONOR MEN LIKE HIM (Philippians 2:29)

Epaphroditus had gone to Rome to help Paul. While there he got sick and almost died. Paul sent him back home to Philippi with instructions to **“Welcome him in the Lord with all joy and honor men like him”**.

After reading the book *“If You Can Keep It”* by Eric Metaxas, the failure to honor heroes has come more sharply into focus. The following thoughts are adapted from that book. To illustrate the point Metaxas relates receiving an article about Nathan Hale in Yale’s alumni magazine. Hale, as you know, bravely volunteered to go behind British lines in service of his country. He was captured and hanged. Just before dying, this great hero said: *“My only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country”*. The article in Yale’s magazine, however, promoted a bobble head doll of Hale with a goofy oversized head designed by the class of 1975. They gave it away for their fortieth reunion. Unfortunately, we live in a generation that has forgotten to honor “men like him”.

In the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid is a famous painting of a farmer named Cincinnatus being called to be the leader of his country. Rome was in desperate need of someone to lead them into battle. Cincinnatus accepted that challenge and personally led his people to victory in the battle at Aequi. Then, 15 days later, he promptly resigned his position of prestige and power and returned to his farm. This is essentially what George Washington did after defeating the British. On March 16, 1783, Washington’s officers met, outraged that congress had not paid them. Some suggested a coup, threatening to walk away from their duty and allow congress to defend itself. They further planned to establish a military government with Washington as the dictator. Washington shamed them for such thinking. Like Cincinnatus centuries before, Washington voluntarily gave up the temptation to have indisputable power. He concluded his speech by reaching into his pocket for a pair of spectacles to read the fine print of a letter from a Virginia congressman. He apologized for doing so and said: *“Gentlemen, you must pardon me. I have grown gray in your service and now find myself growing blind.”* With these words the mood changed and some of those battle hardened warriors actually began to weep. Today, however, we live in a generation that has forgotten to “honor men like him”. Modern man finds it fashionable to denigrate our founding fathers as arrogant white slave holders not worthy of our honor and admiration.

Jefferson’s reputation too has fallen prey to intellectual sloppiness. Today it is en vogue to describe him as a man who didn’t believe in God. Metaxas reminds us, however, of Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia: Jefferson wrote: *“Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people, that those liberties are the gift of God? That they are violated but with his wrath? I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that His justice cannot sleep forever”*. Unfortunately, we live in a generation that has forgotten to “honor men like him”.

The idea of “American exceptionalism” was coined in 1835 by Alexis de Tocqueville. He wrote: *“The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one”*. Unfortunately, idea of “American exceptionalism” has also fallen out of fashion. The unbiased student of history, however, must face the fact that there is something decidedly different about America. G. K Chesterton, for example, pointed out that “America is the only nation founded on a creed”. There are roughly 200 countries in the world, but America is the only one that can be described that way. The American creed is not parochial but universal. It declares that all men are created equal and that government exists only by the consent of the governed. One simple way to help perpetuate this remarkable heritage, is to follow the teaching of Scripture and give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7).