

## Sunday Morning Message

May 26, 2019

*What Mean Ye By These Stones*

*A Memorial Day Message*

Text – Joshua 4:1 – 9; 19 - 24

Congregational Reading – Joshua 4:19 - 24

### Introduction

Read the text and explain the story.

Origins of Memorial Day – Group of mothers of Civil War heroes were decorating the graves of their husbands and sons.

Memorial Day was born out of necessity. After the American Civil War, a battered United States was faced with the task of burying and honoring the 600,000 to 800,000 Union and Confederate soldiers who had died in the single bloodiest military conflict in American history. The first national commemoration of Memorial Day was held in Arlington National Cemetery on May 30, 1868, where both Union and Confederate soldiers are buried.

Several towns and cities across America claim to have observed their own earlier versions of Memorial Day or “Decoration Day” as early as 1866. (The earlier name is derived from the fact that decorating graves was and remains a central activity of Memorial Day.) But it wasn’t until a remarkable discovery in a dusty Harvard University archive the late 1990s that historians learned about a Memorial Day commemoration organized by a group of freed black slaves less than a month after the Confederacy surrendered in 1865.

Back in 1996, David Blight, a professor of American History at Yale University, was researching a book on the Civil War when he had one of those once-in-a-career eureka moments. A curator at Harvard’s Houghton Library asked if he wanted to look through two boxes of unsorted material from Union veterans.

“There was a file labeled ‘First Decoration Day,’” remembers Blight, still amazed at his good fortune. “And inside on a piece of cardboard was a narrative handwritten by an old veteran, plus a date referencing an article in *The New York Tribune*. That narrative told the essence of the story that I ended up telling in my book, of this march on the race track in 1865.”

The clubhouse at the Charleston racetrack where the 1865 Memorial Day events took place.

The race track in question was the Washington Race Course and Jockey Club in Charleston, South Carolina. In the late stages of the Civil War, the Confederate army transformed the formerly posh country club into a makeshift prison for Union captives. More than 260 Union soldiers died from disease and exposure while being held in the race track’s open-air infield. Their bodies were hastily buried in a mass grave behind the grandstands.

When Charleston fell and Confederate troops evacuated the badly damaged city, freed slaves remained. One of the first things those emancipated men and women did was to give the fallen Union prisoners a proper burial. They exhumed the mass grave and reinterred the bodies in a new cemetery with a tall whitewashed fence inscribed with the words: “Martyrs of the Race Course.”

And then on May 1, 1865, something even more extraordinary happened. According to two reports that Blight found in *The New York Tribune* and *The Charleston Courier*, a crowd of 10,000 people, mostly freed slaves with some white missionaries, staged a parade around the race track. Three thousand black

schoolchildren carried bouquets of flowers and sang "John Brown's Body." Members of the famed 54th Massachusetts and other black Union regiments were in attendance and performed double-time marches. Black ministers recited verses from the Bible. (<https://www.history.com/news/memorial-day-civil-war-slavery-charleston>)

On Memorial Day we remember and honor the men and women who have given their lives and have paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we can enjoy the liberty that we have today. We have freedom today – freedom to worship God or not worship God, freedom to come and go as we please, freedom to work hard and succeed in business or education or the arts, or whatever we choose to do to feed our families, we have the freedom to voice our opinions and express our views, and even the freedom to disagree publicly with our own government.

The freedom that we enjoy today in America was paid for with the blood of many who have given themselves in sacrifice for the good of others. Being willing to die for someone else is the greatest expression of love:

*"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13)

God is all about remembering - Biblical Examples:

### **The Passover**

*"And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever."* - (Exodus 12:11-14)

### **The Lord's Supper**

*"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."* - (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)

*"And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."* - (Deuteronomy 6:10-12)

God doesn't like it when we forget what He has done for us. That is why He has set up occasions for memorials – reminders.

By the way – God doesn't forget us either.

*"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."* - (Hebrews 6:10)

According to Hebrews 6:10 – it is unrighteous – it is sin – to forget what God and others have done for us.

Forgetting begins with a lack of reflection; and results in a lack of appreciation.

### Transition

On this Memorial Day, don't be guilty of forgetting. Don't get so wrapped up in your own little world, and your own little problems, that you forget what others have done for you.

On this Memorial Day Sunday, I want to give you three thoughts about what God would not have forget:

On Memorial Day, we remember those who died in order to give us the freedom that we have today:

**We remember the Lord** who died on the Cross for our sins so that we could have freedom from the bondage of sin, and forgiveness from the penalty of sin, which was death in Hell. All we need to do is believe in order to access that freedom and forgiveness is to believe and receive:

*"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Romans 10:9-10, 13)

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16)

*"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:17)

*"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"* (John 1:12)

While we honor the many who have died to give us the liberty that we enjoy; let us not forget the One who taught us this principle in the first place, and exemplified it Himself by dying on the cross to free us from the bondage of sin and to provide forgiveness for us so that fellowship could be restored with our Father which is in Heaven.

*"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

(Romans 5:8)

### **We remember those who died in their service for the Lord.**

*"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ...*

*And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." - (Hebrews 11:13, 36-40)*

In the first century, many if not most of the New Testament Saints were martyred for the cause of Christ:

**John the Baptist** – beheaded by Herod (Matthew 14:3 – 12)

**Stephen** – stoned to death in Jerusalem in A.D. 34 (Acts 7:59)

**James the son of Zebedee** – beheaded by Agrippa in A.D. 45

**Philip** – stoned in Phrygia in A.D. 54

**James, the brother of Jesus** – beaten to death on the steps of the Temple in A.D. 63.

**Barnabus** – burned on Cyprus in A.D. 64

**John Mark** – dragged through the streets of Alexandria in A.D. 64

**Simon Peter** – crucified (upside down) by Nero in A.D. 69 (Peter's wife was also crucified.)

**Paul** – beheaded by Nero in A.D. 69

### **Additional martyrs of the first century**

Aristarchus, Epaphras, Priscilla and Aquilla, Andronicus, and Juna were all martyred by Nero in A.D.70. Silas was beaten to death in Macedonia; Onesiphorus and Porphyrius were dragged to death by horses; Andrew was crucified; Bartholomew was flayed alive; Thomas was burned by hot plates and eventually stabbed to death; Matthew was nailed to the ground and beheaded; Matthias was crucified and beheaded; Luke was hanged in Greece in A.D. 93; Antipas was roasted alive in A.D. 95.

Note – John the apostle is said to have been boiled in oil by Emperor Domitian but miraculously survived. He was banished to the penal isle of Patmos where he was given the Revelation by the Lord. Tradition has it that he was eventually released and returned to Ephesus where he was the pastor. He died at the age of 100 being the only apostle that was not martyred.

John Huss was burned at the stake in 1415

Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Flemming, and Roger Youderian were massacred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador

**We remember those who gave their lives in service to our country.**

Revolutionary War

War of 1812

Civil War

WWI

WWII

Korea

Viet Nam

Desert Storm

Iraqi Freedom

Afghanistan

Not to mention all of the many conflicts that our soldiers have fought in.

Not to mention the many men and women who have died in services like the Coast Guard while attempting rescue one of us.

Not to mention all of the training exercises where men and woman have tragically died preparing themselves to protect us.

### **Illustration - *"What I'll Be Doing For Memorial Day"* By James E. Leiker**

Memorial Day is a rough day for me. It's a day of remembering.

Remembering can be curse when you've spent years trying to forget. It's even worse when you get mad at yourself for not being able to remember. It's strange that you forget so many things you want to remember and remember so much that you really want to forget.

I spent 11 months, 28 days in sunny Southeast Asia. I came back physically whole. "No members missing" tag on this Marine. By the Grace of God, good training, and just plain pure dumb luck, I suffered no more than a slight hearing loss, a concussion or two, and years of mixed-blessing memories.

I've been a good husband to my wife, a lousy father to my two daughters, a mediocre son to my mother, and a reasonably successful employee to five employers over the years. With these results, I consider myself as doing better than the average bear when compared to many of my fellow veterans. The Grace of God and luck still abound.

Memorial Day is not a day for self-evaluation or selfish thoughts. So I turn my remembrances to other people, places, and things.

I remember heat. Heat that kept you from getting a full breath for weeks. Heat that sapped your strength so that you were beyond exhaustion after a minor exertion. Heat that made you tired and kept you from sleeping. Heat that made you sweat buckets. Heat that made you freezing cold at 70 degrees.

I remember lush green mountains that always seemed to go up not down. I remember red earth that

was sticky enough to glue a deuce and a half in place, slippery enough to make it impossible to stand on, and dusty enough to choke you into a coughing fit like a bad cigar.

I remember rice paddies. They could get you killed or save your life. Dikes stop bullets but can leave you exposed if you're dumb enough to walk on them. The water smelled of feces but was better than not drinking at all.

I remember rain. Rain that broke the intolerable heat then never stopped. Rain that was as gentle as silk or as stinging as a nest of bees. Rain that let you get a good clean shower and rotted your feet 'til they bled.

I remember the sun. The sun that created the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets I've ever seen in my life. The sun that you couldn't look at...if you ever wanted to see again. The sun that you could feel without touching it.

I remember a moon that shone so bright you could read a map by it. I remember moonlight dancing on foliage that made you see nothing one minute and imagine a host of slinking VC the next.

I'll never forget the colors of an explosion close at hand. The white center bleeding out to a yellow ring surrounded by black rolling smoke was beautiful and terrifying at the same time.

I remember the orange and green tracers dancing lazily through the night, while I prayed that none came to roost on me.

But above all this, I remember people. Faces, personalities, and human events still crowd my days and nights with pleasure and pain. I can remember entire conversations and events in explicit detail. I cannot remember the names of more than a few, and I don't know why. Shouldn't this be the other way around?

I remember the parting face of the Huey jock, who took an RPG in the nose 100 yards after he lifted off from leaving me in a clearing. I remember every detail of the guy who hung himself 2 weeks before he was going back to the world. I remember the guitar songs taught to me by the kid from Boston, who drove a jeep over a 105 shell buried on a dirt road and tripped the trap. I remember the quiet calm of the guy who told me he was sorry and assured me that I would be O.K. after he stepped on a mortar-round booby trap. All this while I held what was left of him in my arms, and we filled him with enough morphine to kill a horse because he was cut in half below the waist; and we knew he wouldn't survive the slick ride back to DaNang.

Of the hundreds I knew, I kick myself for remembering so few. Especially on this Memorial Day when I should be able to remember each and every one. They are the ones who paid for this Memorial Day. This is their day. I will not spoil it by forgetting even one of their number.

God help me, I will remember. From this day forth I will carry their memory and spirit with me as a living memorial to their sacrifice and dedication to God, country, duty, and honor. They shall not pass gently into the night as long as I have breath in my body to shout to the world...

REMEMBER, REMEMBER...For God's sake Remember.

### **We remember those who gave their lives in the line of duty.**

First Responders – Police, Firefighters, and other rescue workers – like all of the men and women who went into the Towers on 9-11 attempting to save the lives of those trapped within.

We don't want to forget these people. We don't want to forget to honor these people.

## Conclusion

My challenge for us this morning is this: Most of us will not be given the choice to die for our country or our Lord, but we can choose to live for our Lord and live for the people in our country and community. It is really God's choice as to whether we live or die. But it is our choice as to whether or not we live for Him, or for our country.

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."* (Romans 12:1-2)

### Stand for the Lord

This humanistic and atheistic world along with the Devil are aggressively attacking God and God's people today. Stand for the Lord! Stand for the principles found in the Word of God, which are the same principles that this nation was founded upon. These are the principles that make us free:

*"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32)

### Serve the Lord

Find something to do within the local church that will help it to advance the cause of Christ and spread His gospel.

Get the training you need

Go soulwinning

Teach a Sunday School Class

Work a Bus Route

Get involved in our upcoming VBS program

Do something for the Lord

### Serve your Generation

*"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:"* (Acts 13:36)

Outside of your service to the people of God through the local church, find out how you can be a blessing to the people of your community. Make this community a better place because you live here. Let the people who do serve in our community know that you appreciate them.

God may call on you to die for the cause of freedom, He may not. That is His choice. But our choice is to live for God, and live for the people that God has given us to serve.