

Sunday Morning Message

May 26, 2024

These All Died in Faith

Topic – Memorial Day

Text – Hebrews 11

Congregational Reading – Hebrews 11:13 - 16

Introduction

On Memorial Day we remember and honor the men and women who had fought and died for our nation. It began as a national tradition after the Civil War.

Illustrate – Brother Bob Fenton goes to the Viet Nam War Memorial in Wildwood every year, and he remembers the names, and looks for the names of the men who fought alongside of him in the war but lost their lives.

Memorial Day has evolved through the years and has become a time when we not only honor the dead who served their country and fought for liberty in our military, but we as Christians also remember those who have given their lives for the cause of Christ through the centuries – the martyrs. We also celebrate those who are still alive and are serving America today. This year, as we honor those who have given their lives in what Abraham Lincoln called that “last full measure of devotion,” we will also express our thanks to living veterans; to those still serving in the military today; to those who serve their communities – the first responders.

We live in the greatest country in the world. America is the freest nation in the world. Many men and women have given and are now willing to give their lives in sacrifice so that we can enjoy the freedom that we have today.

Transition

Today, we are going to examine a chapter of Scripture within the New Testament that honors some of the heroes of faith from the Old Testament; all of whom lived their lives, faithfully serving their God, and many who gave their lives because of their faith.

I. Those Who Lived Their Faith and Died in Faith (vs. 1 – 35a)

In our text in Hebrews 11, we read about men and women in the Old Testament period who also gave their lives, or at least were willing to give their lives because of their faith in God. Faith is really what this chapter of Scripture is all about.

Vs. 1 – 6 give us the definition of faith; what it means to have faith.

Faith is always expressed in action.

Hold your place here in Hebrews 11 and turn in your Scriptures to James 2:18 - 26:

"18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:18-26)

So, faith is active, and faith is visible. Sometimes, people claim that they have faith, but you cannot see it.

Hebrews 11 is known as the Hall of Faith because it puts on display many of the saints from the Old Testament who had lived lives of faith, died in faith; many of which died for their faith.

"13 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. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The chapter honors many of the more renown members of the Old Testament faith community. We read the names and get a brief overview of some of the people who lived for the Lord during the Old Testament period:

1. Abel (v. 4)
2. Enoch (v. 5)
3. Noah (v. 7)
4. Abraham (vs. 8 – 10; 17 - 19)
5. Sarah (vs. 11 – 12)
6. Isaac (v. 20)
7. Jacob (v. 21)
8. Joseph (v. 22)
9. Moses (v. 23 - 29)

10. Joshua (v. 30)

11. Rahab (v. 31)

In vs. 32 – 35a, the pace quickens. The writer to Hebrews is summing up his argument and he will quickly list a few more names and speak also about the many unnamed heroes who lived for God as people of great faith, who God used to do many miraculous and mighty things.

II. Those Who Died for Their Faith (vs. 35b – 40)

Notice how the scene changes in the middle of verse 35. The first phrase of the verse tells of the women who had their sons raised from the dead – the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:22 – 23), and the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:35 – 36).

But then, the writer begins to list many of the people who died horrible deaths. They were put to death because of their faith in God.

The people at the beginning of the chapter lived lives of faith and were all willing to give their lives for the Lord, but the many people mentioned at the end of the chapter were all people who demonstrated their faith in God by dying for their faith. They were killed because they loved and served the Lord.

The New Testament records many others who died for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Note – John the Baptist is said to be the last of the Old Testament prophets as well as the first of the New Testament prophets. He is not part of the church. (John 3:29) He is the friend of the bridegroom, not the bride or part of the bride. The bride of Christ is the Church.

2. Jesus – crucified

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

4. James the son of Zebedee – beheaded by Agrippa in A.D. 45 (James 12:1 – 2)

Historical Tradition records many others from the New Testament who were martyred for their faith:

Philip – stoned in Phrygia in A.D. 54

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

2. Barnabus – burned in Cyprus in A.D. 64

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

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

5. Paul – beheaded by Nero in A.D. 69
6. 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.

Those were all within the first century, but they all died in their faith and because of their faith, and it is through their faith and through their sacrifice that faith was handed down to us today.

There have been millions more who have given their lives for the cause of Christ:

Illustrate – Jon Huss - After translating some of the sermons of John Wycliff into the Bohemian language, Huss began to cry out for reform in the church; and return to the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice. Huss believed that Christ, not Peter was the foundation of the Church. He was branded as a heretic and ex-communicated. He was tricked by the Pope to attend the Council of Constance in 1414; being guaranteed safe passage and a platform to present his claims. He was arrested, given a mock trial, and then burned at the stake. He was quoted to say, “In the truth of the gospel which I have written, taught, and preached, I die willingly and joyfully today.” It is said that he sang “Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, have mercy on me” as the flames engulfed him. The Moravians were a Bible believing group in Bohemia that resulted from the teaching of Huss.

Illustrate – The Waldensians - In 1400, a village of Waldensians in the Valley of Pragelas in Italy was attacked on Christmas Day in 1400. All of the inhabitants of the village were forced to flee and, without shelter, froze to death (including 80 children). Of those who survived, many lost their hands and feet to frostbite.

Illustrate – Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming were all slaughtered by the Aucan tribe in Ecuador that they were trying to reach with the Gospel.

Jim Elliot is famous for saying: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Illustrate – Jude Montis, Davy and Natalie Lloyd were killed (Thursday, May 23, 2024) in Port-au-Prince in Haiti by the ruthless gains who have taken over the country. Haiti has been an extremely dangerous place for a long time, and I am sure that these folks were encouraged to leave and come home where it is safe, but they stayed so that they could continue to minister to the people of Haiti.

According to their ministry's website: Missions in Haiti's website says its goal is "to see the Gospel of Christ make a difference in the lives of Haiti's young people."

The website also said: "Although the entire nation is steeped in poverty, the children suffer the worst," they wrote on the website. "Thousands are malnourished, uneducated, and headed for hopeless lives apart from Christ."

These folks are heroes. They died giving their lives for the cause of Christ.

III. Those Who Still Live in Faith (Hebrews 12:1 – 3)

Chapter twelve begins with a reminder to us who are still alive. Keep serving the Lord because those who served and died from previous generations are watching us.

Let us not let the Lord and the previous generations down. They are watching us. Let us remain faithful until the Lord calls us home to Heaven.

Conclusion

On Memorial Day, we remember and honor those who have given their lives for us.

A. The Lord

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." - (Romans 5:8)

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

B. Those That Have Died for The Cause of Christ

C. Those That Have Fallen for the Cause of Freedom for America

Revolutionary War

War of 1812

Civil War

WWI

WWII

Korea

Viet Nam

Desert Storm

Iraqi Freedom

Afghanistan

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

D. Those Who Have Fallen in the Line of Duty

First Responders – Police, Firefighters, and other rescue workers – like all 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.

E. Those Who Still Serve Today